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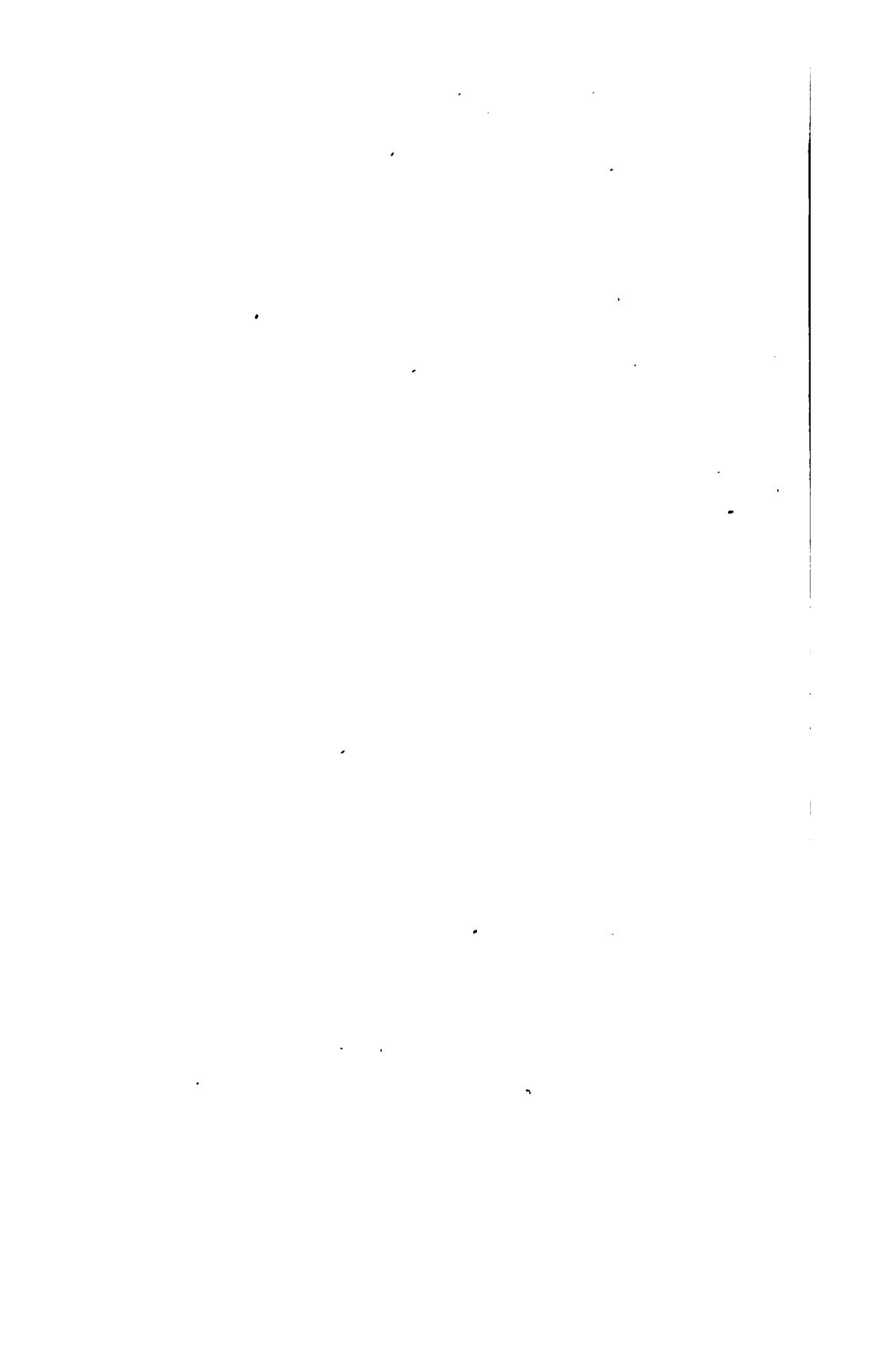
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ON

AFFLICTION AND DESERTION.

BY WAY OF CONSOLATION AND INSTRUCTION.

FROM SIBBS, MANTON, BISHOP REYNOLDS, FLAVEL, BATES, COLLINGS,
CHARNOCK, DORNEY, BISHOP HOPKINS, GOODWIN,
TOPLADY, HILL, JAY, ETC.

REVISED BY THE REV. J. EAST, M.A.
CURATE OF ST. MICHAEL'S, BATH.

" Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in my trouble,"
Psalm cxxix. 92.

" If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable,"
1 Corinthians xv. 19.

" This is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life," 1 John ii. 25.

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AND RICHARDSON, BRISTOL.

1838.

663.

ADVERTISEMENT.

It has been a privilege to be permitted to revise this volume of rich extracts from the writings of those eminent men, whose names are acknowledged in the title-page. Having myself derived instruction and edification from that revision, I gladly recommend the compiling labours of a christian friend, to the numerous family of the children of affliction, each of whom may here, under the teaching of THE HOLY GHOST THE COMFORTER, find some topic of consolation adapted to his case, however peculiar.

J. E.

Bath, Oct. 4, 1838.



P R E F A C E .

It may be asked,—what need was there for another book on the subject of affliction? Have we not already those that are excellent?—Hill's “It is Well.”—Cecil's “Visit to the House of Mourning.”—“Griffith and Thelwall on Affliction.” To this I would answer, in the language of St. Paul, or rather of HIM, by whom St. Paul was inspired, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who COMFORTETH us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort, wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God,” 2 Cor. i. 3, 4.

A heathen could say, “*Haud ignara mali misericordia succurrere disco.*” And ought a christian to do less? Those, who have passed through the deep waters (only) can appreciate the com-

fort of a single text of scripture applied to the wounded spirit, or of one sentence from the works of those, whom God has owned and honored in their generation. "Affliction cometh forth not from the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground," saith one, who could speak experimentally on the subject. But we need much assistance, when under the chastening rod of a Father, to make us believe that the gall and wormwood are medicinal—the severity of the discipline either necessary or deserved. Afflictions may be the means of adding sin to sin ; for all afflictions arise from that one deadly cause : when sin entered into the world, affliction quickly followed in its steps. There are temptations peculiar to the afflicted state ; under the prostration of soul consequent upon it, the enemy comes in like a flood, and tempts to murmuring, to fretting, or despair. But we should never, for one moment, forget that all suffering is from God, and all instruments are his instruments, Isaiah liv. 16.—"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Have we not to do with ONE, who is the Sovereign Lord God, who "giveth not account of His matters?" And therefore, the same inspired writer asks the question,—"Why dost thou strive with HIM?" As if it were the excess of madness to do so. And is it not?—Shall the poor worm of a day reply against HIM, who is from everlasting to

everlasting?—The wretched, blind, and miserable creature contend with his Omniscient and Omnipotent Creator? *μη γένοιτο!* Rather let him lay his mouth in the dust, and cry out, with Eli of old, “It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.” As in Israel, those that slighted the rebukes of their earthly parents were stoned without pity, so will God deal with them that kick against his discipline, and make no profit of his rod. Let us pray then, that He would anoint our eyes with spiritual eyesalve, Rev. iii. 18—that we may see that affliction is the hyssop to cleanse, Psalm li. 7—the refiner’s fire to consume the dross of sin. For He, who cannot lie, hath told us so, Heb. xii. 6—11. Ought not “the little, little flock,” *τὸ μικρὸν ποίμνιον*, (Luke xii. 32) to rest satisfied, that “affliction” is the mark, that it hath pleased the GREAT SHEPHERD of souls to put upon his sheep? The worst sentence that can be pronounced, is Ephraim’s, “Let him alone,” Hosea iv. 17. Oh! wait His pleasure. “Look unto the hills, whence cometh help:”—say, with David, “I know that thou in very faithfulness hast afflicted me.” If we seek it, God’s instruction will direct to safe and honorable walking, amidst the most malignant enemies. A sense of His pardon is the greatest help and comfort under the bitterest trials and wants, Job xix. Faith in His promises and characters, will keep from fainting amidst powerful temptations,

distresses, and enemies unnumbered. And when we have experienced His goodness in waiting for Him, we should the more encourage others to patient expectation of His grace. Ask for that faith, which enabled the martyrs (mentioned Heb. xi.) to rejoice in tribulation, and glorify God in the fires. But the desponding soul may say, that they had the miraculous gifts of the Spirit to sustain them in their conflicts, and these have long ceased to be the portion of the church. But, "O thou afflicted and tossed with tempests," have we not examples, if not in our own day, yet within a century, where faith in a crucified Saviour, has sustained one, who passed the half of her life under the bitterest trials and persecutions, and who was enabled to say, to use the beautiful translation of our immortal Cowper,—

"Long plung'd in sorrow, I resign
My soul to that dear hand of thine,
Without reserve or fear ;
That hand can wipe my streaming eyes,
Or into smiles of glad surprise,
Transform the falling tear.

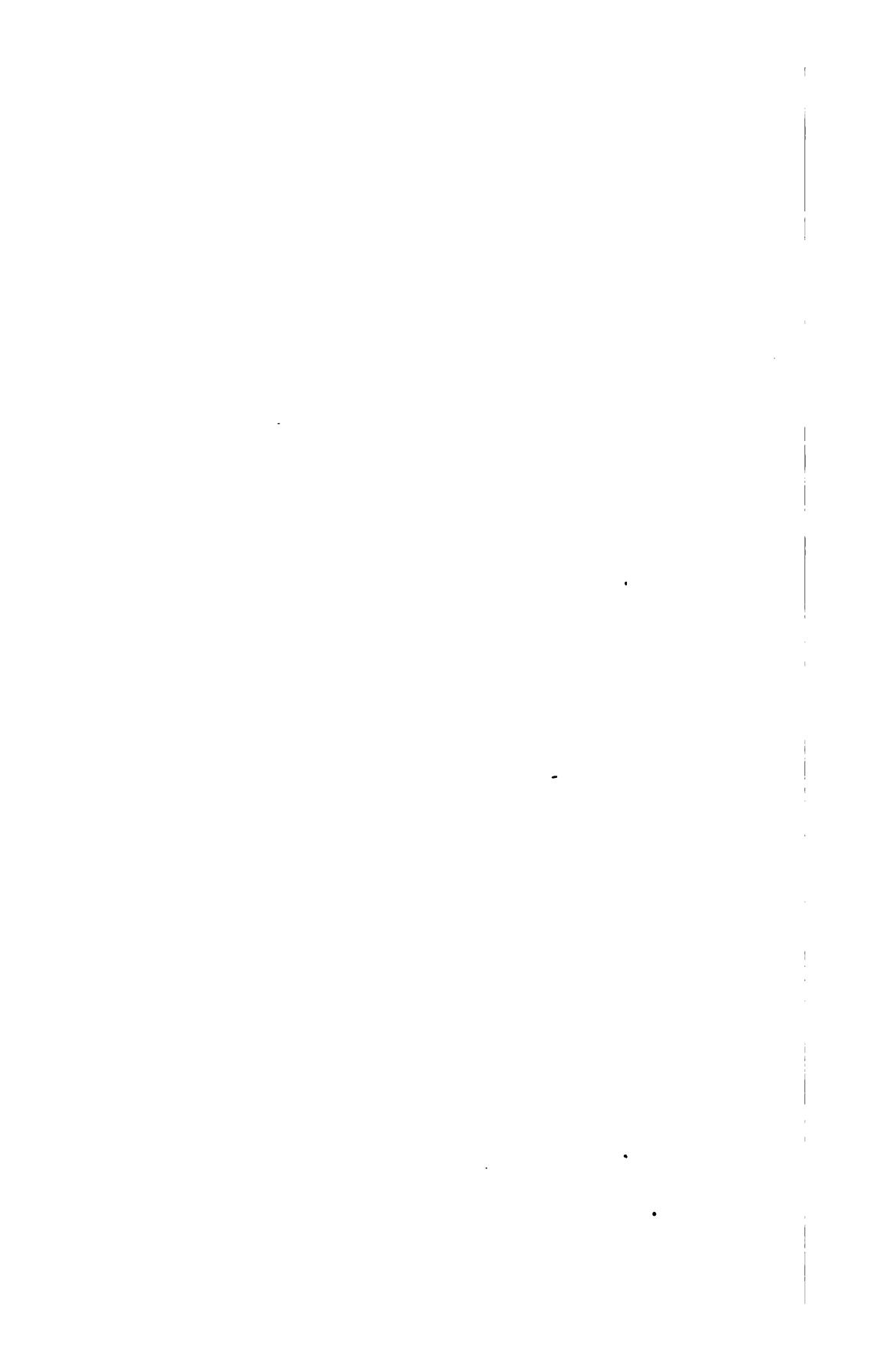
My sole possession is thy love ;
In earth beneath, or heav'n above,
I have no other store ;
And tho' with fervent suit I pray,
And importune thee night and day,
I ask thee nothing more.

Mine hours with undiminish'd force
 And speed, pursue their destin'd course,
 Obedient to thy will ;
 Nor would I murmur at my doom,
 Tho' still a suff'rer from the womb,
 And doom'd to suffer still.

At thy command, where'er I stray,
 Sorrow attends me all the way,
 A never-failing friend ;
 And if my suff'ring may augment
 Thy praise, behold me well content,
 Let sorrow still attend.

It costs me no regret, that she,
 Who follow'd Christ, should follow me,
 And tho' where'er she goes,
 Thorns spring spontaneous at her feet,
 I love her, and extract a sweet,
 From all my bitter woes."

And oh ! if the consideration of this matter should lead one rebellious soul to humility and submission, to raise his thoughts from this earth, lying under the curse of sin, to that blood-bought rest above, prepared from everlasting, for the elect ; whose names and members are, and have been written in the book of life, "when as yet there was none of them," Psalm cxxxix. 16, how would a brother pilgrim and sufferer rejoice !— how would it "lead him to put on the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, that God might be glorified in all things."



ON

AFFLICTION AND DESERTION.

I. AFFLICTION and misery are the common burden of the sons of Adam. In the present life all are subject to misery, some more, some less. We walk through a valley of tears, live in a groaning world; none have such an uninterrupted current of worldly happiness, but that they have their crosses and afflictions. These things are common to man. We are told in the book of Job, v. 7, "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward;" and xiv. 1, "Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble." None can reasonably expect to be absolutely exempted from the common lot of human fallen nature. Though life be short, yet is it long enough to be vexed with many sorrows. "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been," saith old Jacob, Gen. xlvi. 9. Since they are evil, it is well they are but few. Few men consider this, that they come into the world to bear crosses, but rather imagine they come hither to spend

their days in pleasure ; at least they do not observe the true cause of their troubles, nor the remedy. The true cause is sin. Man's transgressions are the door by which it entered. And the proper remedy is the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Whatever, then, may be the particular and various dispensations of God towards men, yet to be miserable in some sort or degree is common to all Adam's posterity, which should make us look higher than the present life.

Christ hath promised an happiness, that will counter-vail all these afflictions. There is a fourfold comparison, which believers usually make, or in scripture are taught to make between this life, and that which is to come.

1. Sometimes they compare temporal good things, with eternal good things ; or the portion of the carnal man, with the happiness of the child of God. "From men which are thy hand, O Lord ; from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure : they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes. As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness : I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness," Psalm xvii. 14, 15.

2. Sometimes they compare temporal evil things, with eternal evil things ; as a prison with hell, or the killing of the body, with the casting the body and soul into hell-fire. "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear ; fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell ; yea, I say unto you, fear him," Luke xii. 4, 5. Certainly it is more important to fear displeasing God, than displeasing men : the utmost they can do is to kill the body, and then their malice is at an end : but God can cast both

body and soul into everlasting torments. Every one would submit to a lesser evil, to avoid a greater. When you sin to escape trouble in the world, you run into eternal sufferings to avoid temporal ones : no wrath like the wrath of God : no torments like hell-fire.

3. Sometimes they compare temporal good with eternal evil ; as Matt. xvi. 26, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" The plentiful life of worldlings, with the forfeiting of the soul ; the pleasures of sin for a season, with the pains of hell for ever.

4. The fourth sort of comparison, which the scriptures direct us to, is temporal evil things, with eternal good things. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," Rom. viii. 18. Sufferings for the present may be very great, but the glory that is revealed to us, and shall one day be revealed in us, is much greater : as there is no comparison between our suffering here, and eternal ease and rest. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17. The sufferings of the present world are light and short, not in themselves, but in comparison with eternal life. In themselves they may be, some of them are very sharp and grievous, and some also very long and tedious ; but, what a point is to a circumference, that is time to eternity. And what a feather is to a talent of lead, that are present evils to future glory and blessedness. All this is spoken to show, that it is better to be miserable with the people of God, than happy with his enemies, and that we should not be drawn away from Christ, either by the comfortable, or the troublesome things we meet with in this world.

II. Not from the dust, affliction grows,
 Nor troubles rise by chance ;
 But we are born to cares and woes,—
 A sad inheritance !

As sparks break out from burning coals,
 And still are upwards borne,
 So grief is rooted in our souls,
 And man grows up to mourn.

Yet with my God I leave my cause,
 And trust his promis'd grace ;
 He rules me by his well-known laws,
 Of love and righteousness.

Not all the ills, that e'er I bore,
 Shall spoil my future peace ;
 For death and hell can do no more
 Than what my Father please.

III. When thou art in a desperate state, and there seems no way of escape, remember, that God is the same still ; He is as able to help now as ever, and can create comforts for thee in thy greatest troubles ; as in the first creation he made light out of darkness, order out of confusion ; so still he is able out of thy confused and perplexed state, to create peace and comfort. Thou knowest not what to do perhaps, thy mind is so distracted and troubled ; why, commit thy soul to God, he can raise an excellent frame out of the chaos of thy thoughts, therefore be not dismayed, consider thou hast God in covenant with thee, and hast to deal with an Almighty Creator, who can send present help in time of need. Therefore never despair, but frequent the means of grace, and still think of God, reconciled to thee in Christ Jesus, who hath paid thy debt of ten thousand talents,

and who, having begun a work of grace in thee, will perform it unto the end. Commit thy soul unto Him as a faithful Creator, for guidance and direction in all thy perplexities, until he bring thee to perfect happiness.

IV. God doth not govern the world only by his will, as an absolute monarch, but by his wisdom and goodness as a tender Father. It is not His greatest pleasure to show his sovereign power, or his inconceivable wisdom, but his immense goodness, to which he makes his other attributes subservient. What was God's end in creating, is his end in governing, which was the communication and diffusion of his goodness; we may be sure from hence, that God will do nothing but for the best, his wisdom appointing it with the highest reason, and his goodness ordering it to the most gracious end: and because he is the highest good, he doth not only will good, but the best good in every thing he acts. Now what greater comfort is there than this? That there is One who presides over the world, who is so wise he cannot be mistaken—so faithful he cannot deceive—so pitiful he cannot neglect his people,—and so powerful, that he can make even stones to be turned into bread, if he please.

V. It should be our great care, not to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor to be too much dejected under it. The smart would keep us from despising an affliction in itself, but we make light of it, when we are careless of improving it for the ends for which God inflicts it; we may be sensible of the pain, when we are not sensible of the profit which may accrue to us by it. God forbids here two extremities, the one an excess, the other a want of courage. Both dishonor God; the one in his sovereignty, the other in his good-

ness and love : both are injurious to the sufferer, as he rebels against the one, and loses the sweetness of the other. We should receive the afflictions God sends, with humility without despondency—with reverence without distrust, and endeavour to keep ourselves from either fearing too much, or not fearing God enough, mix reverence with confidence, adore the hand which we feel, and rest in the goodness which He promises. This is the way to reap the fruit of affliction.

All afflictions, let them be from what immediate causes soever, are from the hand of God. Whether they come from man, as loss of goods, or other calamities—whether they be sicknesses, griefs, &c., they are all dispensed by the order of God, for one and the same design—our instruction and improvement. Human reason will not believe this ; some think they come by chance, or look only to second causes, and regard them not as wholesome instructions from God, and the orders of his providence.

This should stop any impatient motions in our minds. It is fit we should be of the Psalmist's temper, hold our peace, because God hath done it, Psalm xxxix. 9. "Shall the thing formed, say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Rom. ix. 21. Is not an infinite wisdom joined with the sovereign authority of God ? And when we are not able to understand the reason of his conduct, we ought to acquiesce in his will and in his wisdom, and stop the motion of any passions, by a humiliation under his hand.

How great is the tenderness of God towards his children groaning under any affliction ! " My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord," &c. He calls them his sons, his children, sweetening in the name, whatsoever is rigorous in the suffering. He gives

them a title, whereby he manifests, that, "in all their affliction, he was afflicted," Isaiah lxiii. 9, and hath a feeling in their trouble. What father is there on earth, unless he hath lost all natural affection, who does not sympathize in the suffering of his children? All the compassions of men combined, are not to be compared to the tenderness and love of God. Afflictions are not always sent by God, in anger with his creatures, but sent by God as a father. "For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" Hebrews xii. 7.

Hence it is easy to conceive, that neither the intentions of God, nor the issue of a suffering, can be any other than happy to those that are the children of God, since he gives the name of child, and son, to every one that he doth instruct, as a father by correction. And this will teach us to have a feeling for the sufferings of others.

1. The afflictions of believers are the effects of divine love: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten," Rev. iii. 19. They are not acts of divine revenge, whereby God would satisfy his justice, but of divine affection, whereby he communicates his goodness, and draws the image of his son with more beauty and glory. They are the acts of God, not of a sleepy careless God, but a wise and indulgent Father, who takes all the care both of instruction and correction, to train you up to his will and likeness. God indeed afflicts other men, who are not in the number of his beloved children; there are few among the sons of men, who pass their lives in a continual prosperity, exempt from all kind of affliction; and all these evils are from God, as the governor of the world; yet, though there be no difference between the sufferings of one and the other, and though the sufferings of believers are often more sharp than those of the world,

in outward appearance ; yet, there is a vast difference in the motives of them ; love makes him strike the believer, and fury makes him strike the unregenerate man. The design of the correction of the one, is their profit, not their ruin ; the strokes upon the other, are often the first fruits of eternal punishment.

Then the world is much mistaken in judging the afflictions of believers to be testimonies of God's anger and hatred. God acts towards the world, as a lawgiver and judge, but towards those he hath renewed and adopted, in the quality of a Father ; and who would judge of the hatred of a tender father, by the corrections he inflicts upon a child, that is dear to him ? Believers suffer by God, not simply as he is a judge, but as he is a paternal judge : there is a combination of judge and father. God does not intend revenge on them, for though they are afflicted on account of sin, yet, the principal aim is to prove them, and reform them, that they may be made meet for a blessed inheritance.

No man, then, has any reason to fancy himself the object of God's love, for outward prosperity. "No man knows either love or hatred by all that is before them," Eccl. ix. 1. God does not always love those, whom his providence preserves in health and ease. Such a conceit proceeds from an ignorance of another life, and too great valuation of the things of this world. Temporal goods, credit in the world, outward conveniences, and uninterrupted health, are effects of God's patience and common goodness, but not of his affection, unless, when by his grace, they are made means to conduct us to a better inheritance ; but how often are they pernicious to us, by reason of our corruption and ill use of them ! How often does the health of the body destroy that of the soul ; and the prosperity of the flesh

ruin that of the spirit? How often do riches and honors bind our hearts to the earth, and expel any thoughts of an heavenly paradise? How often does a portion in this world, make many slack in their endeavours for a portion in heaven? How often do they hinder our sanctification, which is the only means to an happy vision of God? How should this move us in our afflictions, to a walk pleasing to God! This is the motive the apostle uses to press his exhortation, neither to despise the chastening of God, nor despair of his care. Why should we despise that which is dispensed by love? Should we not consider the chastisements, which the love of God sends, both good and wise? Is not love, the motive of suffering, a sufficient ground to prevent distrust and discouragement? Why should any distrust him, by whom he knows he is afflicted? That correction which frightens us, is a work of His love, not of his hatred. Should we not then wait in faith, for an happy issue of that chastisement which we suffer? If we be once thus affected, we shall receive afflictions in a temper answerable to God, and improve them for those holy ends for which God sends them. We should also bear them patiently, humbly, and submissively, since they are not for the reparation of the holiness of the broken law, and the satisfaction of God's justice; but to "prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end," Deut. viii. 16, nay to meeten the soul for heaven. We have reason therefore, to bear them, whatever they may be, in patience. It is inexcusable to murmur at an act of love. Use then spiritual reason in considering them. When the father scourges, the child cries, and then he thinks the father hates him; it is but the error of his childhood, and when he comes to reason, he will regard it as a false opinion.

No righteous man in the world is, or ever was, free from sin, 1 Kings viii. 46. "He scourgeth every son whom he receiveth," Heb. xii. 6. Sin is the cause of every affliction. Were we free from sin, we should be free from scourges. Afflictions will not cease till sin be quite destroyed, which will not be in this world. Justice would find enough in every believer in the world to punish, had he not suffered in the person of his surety, and mercy finds enough to pardon. It is against this then, we should turn our aim. What Satan would make us vent in impatience against God, let us manifest in a hatred of that, which is the true cause of all the evils which in general or particular we suffer. Let us strike that, as much as God strikes us; it is the best way whereby we can show our love to God, who in his strokes upon us, shows his love to us. Let us take no rest till we have put that to death, which alone God hates; it is the death of sin, and not the death of the soul, God designs in afflictions. It is, upon this account, an argument for patience. While our disease remains, why should we think ill of the physician for using means for a cure? If he did not use the means, though sharp, we then should have most reason to accuse him of a want of pity. Sin puts God upon a necessity of scourging; his goodness and wisdom will not suffer him to do anything but what is necessary. "If ye endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons." Here the apostle exhorts to a patient bearing of the hand of God, because he deals with them as a father with his sons, in a way of reward afterwards; as parents caress those children whom they see submissive after punishment. God treats them as children; and being men, they are apt to think, that a troublesome affliction is inconsistent with the love of God; the apostle contradicts such a thought, by the

question, "What son is there, whom the Father chasteneth not?" And he goes further, and draws another conclusion, that we should be so far from thinking that to be afflicted is a sign of our not being the children of God, that on the contrary he affirms, that not to be chastised is a sign, that a man is not of God's family: "If ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." For if the Lord scourgeth every son whom he receives, it is clear, that he, whom he leaves without chastisement, is not a true and legitimate son, but a stranger, a bastard; i. e. one that is not of the family, but takes only the name and quality, without any right to it. Thus God then deals with his children, and there is need of it; for though the regenerate are freed from the slavery and dominion of sin, yet while they are clothed with the flesh, the flesh will lust against the spirit, and they cannot do the things that they would, Gal. v. 17, and God not only chastises them for their infirmities, but to prevent them. And, since the love which he bears us, doth infinitely surpass the affections of the best and tenderest fathers; we may well confess, that no father in the world, can be said to deal with his children, so as God does with the believer. He offers himself to do a father's office. He is the world's sovereign, but the believer's father; as he is the governor of the world, he treats men righteously in his judgments; as he is the Father of believers, he treats them graciously in their afflictions.

Here is a great comfort. If God deal with you as with children in striking you, His wisdom and his goodness are infinite: He does nothing but what is just and reasonable: He is guided by a fatherly affection in all he does: His blows are healthful. If David

could account it a kindness if the righteous would smite him, and count his rebukes as an excellent oil, Psalm cxli. 5, should we not have the same thoughts of the chastisements of God? Men may mistake in their rebukes, God cannot. He is too wise to be deceived, and too good, not to make even his blows become an excellent remedy. He does not assault us as enemies, but as children; not to punish us in his fury, but to refine us; to make us in a state for him to take pleasure in; to make us more like himself, in the frame and temper of our souls. We should receive His corrections therefore, not so much as a punishment, as a favor. No child of God, but is, at one time or another, under his correcting hand. Noah had an affliction in a child, Gen. ix. 25. Abraham and Jacob were afflicted with famine. Isaac by an Esau. Moses was fain to fly for his life. Job suffered the loss of all his children and his goods, and was reproached by his friends. To be in affliction, is to travel in the road that all God's favored ones have gone before. Affliction is one of the clauses of the covenant God hath made with us in Jesus, which he does peculiarly insert, when he owns himself our God and Father; he would visit them with a rod, but not take away his lovingkindness, Psalm lxxxix. 32, 33. In the New Testament, God promises spiritual blessings. In the Old, when he promised more temporal blessings, his people were not exempt from his discipline. In the New, it is more express, that, "through afflictions we must enter into the kingdom of heaven." His only Son must suffer, and so enter into glory. God had one son without sin, but none without sorrow. Those then, that are not under his discipline, are not his children. Afflictions, therefore, should be so far from discouragements, that

where there is an evidence of grace in the heart, they are rather marks of adoption. We might well doubt of a relation to God, if he took no care of us; that we were not his sheep, if he used not his crook to pull us to himself. Let us then receive his chastisements without repining, since he manifests his tender care of us in them, and regards us with the eyes and heart of a Father. If we were wholly strangers, he would abandon us. His paternal rod is for his children—his rod of iron for his enemies.

VI. There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.

There everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers:
Death, like a narrow sea, divides
This heavenly land from ours.

But timorous mortals start and shrink
To cross this narrow sea:
And linger, shivering on the brink,
And fear to launch away.

O! could we make our doubts remove,
Those gloomy doubts that rise,
And see the Canaan, that we love
With unclouded eyes!

Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,
Could fright us from the shore.

VII. When we shall be joined to God the Father,

the Son, and the Holy Spirit, then shall we know, even as we are known, 1 Cor. xiii. 12; then shall all tears be wiped from our eyes, then shall our infirmities be taken from us, then shall we dwell with angels, and all the hosts of heaven in most happy blessedness itself. We see now by this chain, not forged by our own brain, but framed out of God's word, that he is indeed blessed, whom God chooseth, whom Christ redeemeth, whom the Spirit reneweth, whom faith stayeth, whom the word, prayer and discipline, built up in the Lord, in whom faith breedeth peace, peace sincerity, sincerity love, love a fear of displeasing and a care of pleasing God, in whom this care striveth to a mortification in poverty of mind, this poverty coming from a mourning heart, possessed in a meek spirit, and aspiring to true righteousness; all these things being joined with that sanctification, which laments our own sins, as well as the sins of others, and delights in relieving the wants of the poor and needy; knowing how to use prosperity and adversity as pledges of God's favor, and in faith looking for the kingdom of heaven, in the life to come. If any of these links be missing, the chain is broken; if any of these members be wanting, the body of blessedness is dismembered.

VIII. God works by afflictions, and hereby He makes his own dear children exercise themselves more in repentance, weans them from this world, that would alienate them from himself, causes them to cleave faster to Christ by faith, who is the spring of holiness, more earnestly thirst to draw from that fountain, and pursue those things that are heavenly and eternal. God corrects his own to bring them to himself, that they may be partakers of the divine nature, 2 Peter i. 4.

Hence then, we may surely conclude, that afflictions

are not inflicted for the satisfaction of sin. Oh! no, his justice has been satisfied to the uttermost by that precious blood-shedding, even by the blood of the God-man, Acts xx. 28; for "without shedding of blood is no remission," Heb. ix. 22. God aims at our profit; God aims at the advantage of the believing sufferers. He makes them smart to make them gracious here, and to meeten them for the inheritance of the saints in light. To impart to them the highest excellency the poor fallen creature is capable of.

Ought not this to convince us, that we should love God even for afflictions? "In everything give thanks," says the apostle. In these there is great reason to give thanks, if they produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness, Heb. xii. 11. God has appointed these means to communicate his holiness to his children. "And shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Gen. xviii. 25.

How patiently and submissively then, should we bear afflictions! God never strikes but with reason—never strikes his children, but for their good. His blows should be received without murmuring. That, which is not only profitable, but necessary, calls both for our patience, as well as our willing submission, when God wisely inflicts it. Consider too, they are short, they are of no longer duration than this life. And what is time to a blessed eternity?

Our duty under them is to answer the end and intention of God. To form ourselves (or at least aim at it) to that holiness he designs for us. To embrace every motion of the Spirit in our afflictions. To that purpose the rod hath a voice—the Spirit hath a voice, and both must be listened to, Micah vi. 9.

And, because it is a hard matter to be without complaints, the apostle urges this in Hebrews xii. 11, and

prevents indeed the ground of complaint, which is the sharpness of the rod, and sets the smart and the fruit in opposition one to another. "Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. He confesses it is grievous, but it is in appearance only. He instructs us, it admits that suffering is grievous, but wholesome. The end and issue of it is to be considered. Because the trouble and grief, which is in every chastisement, make our flesh to apprehend it as an evil, the apostle distinguishes between the pain and the fruit, and draws an argument of patience from the effect.

1. All afflictions are grievous to the flesh. They are evils in themselves, though blessed in their effects, God does not expect us to be stocks and stones, to be without sense of grief. Christ himself hath set us a pattern of it, he shed tears for the death of his friend Lazarus, and shed drops of blood at the approach of his own suffering. "His soul was sorrowful even unto death." He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." It is no sin to grieve under, to complain of suffering, so as it be without murmuring. If we have not a sense of the grief, "we despise the chastening of the Lord," against which Solomon warns us. We, then, cannot be capable of the profit of affliction. Without some grief, affliction would leave us worse than it finds us. As we ought to hear God when he speaks, so we ought to fear God when he strikes. At first, the trouble of a chastisement does so stun and astonish, it does so wholly possess our spirits, that it makes us mistake the end of it. We cannot sometimes in our pressures, imagine, that a root so bitter can bear a joyful fruit. David is often

full of complaints while he is under affliction, and seems to have no sense of anything, but the present trouble. But afterwards he acknowledges the gracious effect, "In faithfulness," says he, "thou hast afflicted me!" "It is good for me, that I have been afflicted." After experience manifests a truth, which the present grief will not allow us to consider.

2. Though afflictions be grievous, the fruit is gracious to a believer. Experience will correct the false judgment we have while we are under the stroke. Indeed, afflictions, of themselves, are rather a means to cool our affections to holiness; to extinguish in our minds the sparks of godliness, and make us despond and distrust the lovingkindness of God. But God in his sovereign wisdom does so dispose and manage them, that he makes them end in an happy result. By the grace of God they wean us from the world, quicken prayer, awaken us out of our slumbers, and put us upon self-examination. They bring us to seek God as reconciled to us in Christ, the true remedy for all our evils, whatever they may be. The joy of the Holy Ghost is often imparted in a more especial manner, when the afflictions are sharpest upon us. "Having received the word in much affliction, with joy in the Holy Ghost," 1 Thess. i. 6. And though it be not always so, yet after the affliction has done its work, God comes in with comfort and joy.

The use is to teach us to make a right judgment of afflictions. Not to think God intends to destroy when he strikes. We are often in the same error the apostles were in, when they saw Christ walking upon the sea in the dead of the night. When he was coming to succour them, they imagined he was a spirit coming to do them mischief, Mark vi. 48, 49. The flesh often makes us think that God is our enemy, when he is our friend.

But as Christ cried out, "It is I: be not afraid." So doth the apostle to believers in Hebrews, chap. xii. If the flesh suffer, it is good for the spirit. The issue will declare, that, "all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose," Rom. viii. 28.

Finally, let patience and faith have their perfect work. The committing our way to the Lord will, in time, render our tempest-tossed minds calm and reposed. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts *shall* be established," Prov. xvi. 3. God hath always an eye upon them that fear him, Psalm xxxiii. 18, 19. Not to keep distress and affliction from them, but to quicken and purify them under it, to give them, as it were, new life from the dead. We should unreservedly submit our way to the guidance of God's wisdom, with an entire obedience to his will, and a firm reliance on his mercy in Christ, then the success will be gracious here, and glorious hereafter. Wait upon God, seeing he is a God of judgment; "for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they, that wait for him," Isaiah xxx. 18.

IX. Lord! what a wretched land is this,
That yields us no supply!
No cheering fruits, no wholesome trees,
Nor streams of living joy!

But pricking thorns thro' all the ground,
And mortal poisons grow;
And all the rivers that are found,
With dangerous currents flow.

Yet the dear path to thine abode
Lies thro' this horrid land;
Lord! we would keep the heav'nly road,
And run at thy command.

Our souls shall tread the desert through,
With undiverted feet,
And faith and flaming zeal subdue
The terrors that we meet.

A thousand savage beasts of prey
Around the forest roam ;
But Judah's lion guards the way,
And guides the strangers home.

Long nights and darkness dwell below,
With scarce a twinkling ray,
But the bright world to which we go,
Is everlasting day.

By glimm'ring hopes and gloomy fears,
We trace the sacred road,
Thro' dismal deeps, and dang'rous snares,
We make our way to God.

Our journey is a thorny maze,
But we march upwards still ;
Forget these troubles of our ways,
And reach at Zion's hill.

See the kind angels at the gates,
Inviting us to come !
There Jesus the forerunner waits,
To welcome trav'lers home.

There on a green and flow'ry mount
Our weary souls shall sit ;
And with transporting joys, recount
The labours of our feet.

Eternal glories to the king,
That brought us safely through,
Our tongues shall never cease to sing,
And endless praise renew.

X. Sometimes God may forsake us, though we fly to him for help. There is a real, and there is a seeming desertion. Christ may be out of sight, and yet not out of mind. "Sion said, the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me," Isaiah xlix. 14, 15. In the misgivings of our hearts, we think God hath cast off all care, and all thought of us. But God's affectionate answer shows, that all this was but a vain surmise, "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" &c. So "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes; nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications, when I cried unto thee." Psalm xxxi. 22. We are never more in God's heart many times, than when we think he hath quite cast us off. Surely, when the heart is drawn after God, he is not wholly gone. We often mistake God's dispensations, when he is preparing for us more ample relief, and emptying us of all carnal dependence; we judge that that is a forsaking. "When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up," Psalm xciv. 18. Sometimes in point of comfort, we are at a loss, and filled with distractions and troubles, and it is that God may come in for our relief. There is also a real desertion; for God grants his people are forsaken, sometimes:—"For a small moment have I forsaken thee," Isaiah liv. 7, 8. Christ, who could not be mistaken, complaineth of it, Psalm xxii. 1. And the saints often feel it to their bitter cost. There is internal and external desertion. Internal is with respect to the withdrawings of the Spirit. "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me," Psalm li. 11. Now, external desertion is in point of affliction, when God leaves us under sharp crosses, in his wise providence. These must be distinguished; sometimes they are asunder, sometimes they are together: and when they are together, God may re-

turn as to our inward comfort and support, yet not for our deliverance. "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul," Psalm cxxxviii. 3. David was in great straits, and God affords him soul-relief; that was all the answer he could get then, support and strength to bear the troubles, but not deliverance from the affliction. Sometimes the ebb of outward comfort, makes way for a greater tide and influx of inward comfort. "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ," 2 Cor. i. 5. Cordials are for a fainting time. God may return, and may never less forsake us inwardly, than when he forsakes us outwardly. "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day," 2 Cor. iv. 16. God causes sickly bodies to make way for the health of the soul; and an aching heart, for a better heart: when he seems to cast us off in point of our external condition, it is to draw us into more inward communion with himself; that we might receive greater supplies of his grace.

There is a desertion as to comfort, and a desertion as to grace. The children of God may sometimes lose the feelings of God's love. "My soul refused to be comforted, I remembered God, and was troubled; my spirit was overwhelmed," Psalm lxxvii. 2, 3. O what a word was that! Remembering God, revives the heart; but to think of God, and to think of his loss, that was his great trouble. Yet all this while, God may hold communion in point of grace. "Nevertheless, I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand," Psalm lxxiii. 23. He had been under a conflict, lost his comfort, yet he acknowledges supports. God held him in his right hand. Trouble and sorrow have their use: want of comfort makes way many times for increase of

grace ; and therefore, though a man may be deserted as to comfort, yet he may have a greater influence of grace from God. How often does it thus fall out with God's children, that they are qualified by it, to receive more of spiritual blessings, when their sense is lost ; then they become more diligent to recover a sense of God's love again. A summer's sun that is clouded, yields more warmth and comfort to the earth, than a winter's sun that shines the brightest. These cloudy times have their fruit and use ; and christians have the less of happy communion with God, that they may have more holiness ; and less of sweetness, and sensible consolation, that they may have more grace.

There is a desertion also for correction, and a desertion for instruction. Sometimes the aim of it is merely for correction for former sins : it is a chastening over-clouding for our ungracious and unkind dealings with God. He may do it for our sins ; nay, many times for old sins long ago committed, he may charge them anew upon the conscience. Job xiii. 24, compared with v. 26, "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy ? Thou makest me to possess the iniquity of my youth." Many that have grieved God's Spirit in their youth (after they have been converted), God will reckon with them about it in their age. A man will smart for his ungracious courses first or last. Sometimes it is merely for instruction ; it instructs us chiefly to show us God's sovereignty, with the changeableness of the best comfort on this side heaven : to show us his sovereignty, that he will be free to go and come at his own pleasure. He will have his people know he is Lord, and may do with his own as it pleaseth him. The heavenly outshinings of his love, are not at our beck, God will dispense them according to his

pleasure. A mariner has no cause to murmur and quarrel with God, because the wind blows out of the east, when he desires a westerly gale. Why? Because it is God that directs the wind, and he will dispose these things according to his pleasure. So the comfort and outshinings of his love are his, and he will take them, and give them as he thinks good. Again, to show us the changeableness of the best comforts on this side of heaven. When Christ has been in the soul with a full and high influx of comfort, this does not long remain with us, God may withdraw. Observe it often, after the highest enlargements there may be some forsaking. Paul had his raptures; then a messenger of Satan to buffet him. The same disciples that were present at Christ's transfiguration, Peter, James, and John, the same are chosen to be witnesses of his agonies. Matt. xxvi. 37, He took with him Peter, James, and John; first they had a glimpse of his glory, then a sight of his bitter agony and sufferings. Jeremiah in one line sings of praise, and in the next curses the day of his birth, Jer. xx. 13, 14. After the most ravishing comforts, may be a sad suspension. There needs something to humble the creature after such experiences.

Desertion is either felt or not felt; not felt, and then it is more dangerous and usually ends in some notable fall; as Hezekiah, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. God left him, and he was not sensible of it, and then runs into pride and vain-glory, and draws down wrath upon him and his people. God's children, when they do not observe his comings and goings, fall into mischief, it begins their woe. We do not observe what experiences we have of God, then we faint; we do not observe his goings, then that makes way for some fall, and that, for some bitter and sharp affliction: but if it be felt,

it is better provided against. If we do not murmur, but seek to God in Christ to get the loss made up, then it is better. Meek acknowledgments are better than complaining expostulations. It is a sign it works kindly.

There is a partial and there is a total desertion. Those who are bent on serving God, may for awhile and in some degree be left to themselves. We cannot promise ourselves an utter immunity from desertion; but it is not total. We shall find that "The Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake," 1 Sam. xii. 22. Not utterly, yet in part they may be forsaken. Elijah was forsaken, but not like Ahab. Peter was forsaken in part, but not as Judas, who was utterly forsaken, until he was made a prey to despair. David was forsaken to be humbled and bettered; but Saul was forsaken utterly to be destroyed. God may forsake his people, so as to shut out their prayers, Psalm lxxx. 4. So as to interrupt the joy and peace of their heart, to diminish their strength and usefulness; the spiritual life may be much at a stand; so that sin may break out, and they shall fall foully, but not finally. One way or other God is present; present in light sometimes, when he is not present in strength; when he manifests the evil of their present condition, so as to make them groan under it; and present in awakening desires, though not in giving enjoyment. As long as there is any desire after God, he is not yet gone; there is some light and love yet left, manifested by our desires of communion with him.

There is besides a temporary desertion, and an eternal desertion. The first is spoken of Isaiah liv. 7, 8, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee: but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee." God may forsake his servants for awhile; indeed they may have a

long winter of it sometimes ; this is, however, but a moment to the eternity wherein God loves them. But the eternal forsaking is of the final impenitent, when God saith, “ Depart ye cursed.”

The reasons of desertion are,

1. To correct us for our wantonness, and our unkind dealing with Christ. If we neglect him upon frivolous pretences, certainly he will be gone. When we are not at God’s call, neither will he be at ours.
2. To make us acquainted with our utter weakness. What feathers are we when the blast of temptation is let loose upon us ! God will show us what we are by his withdrawing. If God be gone but a moment, or suspend his influence, we cannot stand our ground.
3. To subdue our carnal confidence. “ In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved,” Psalm xxx. 6. We fall asleep upon a carnal pillow, then God draws it away ; “ Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled,” Psalm xxx. 7. God withdraws that we may the more seek after him.
4. To heighten our esteem of Christ, that love may be sharpened by absence ; when once we feel the loss of him to our bitter cost, we will not part with him again easily. Then we are more anxious to observe him in his motions.
5. That by one bitter experience we may learn how to value the sufferings of Christ, when we taste of the bitter cup of which he drank for us. Christians, you do not know what it was for Christ to cry out, “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?” Matt. xxvii. 46 ; until you are sensible in some measure and degree of the like. He tasted of the hell of being forsaken, and we

must pledge him in that cup first or last, that we may know what our Saviour endured for us ; and what a bitter thing it is for a believer to want the light of God's countenance, and those sensible consolations, that he formerly enjoyed.

6. To prevent evil, especially pride : to humble us that we might not be lifted up, and to enteder our hearts to others, 2 Cor. i. 4.

This teaches us, that we are not therefore cast out of the love of God, because there may be some forsaking. Desertion is incident to the most advanced christians. Christ hath legitimated this condition, and made it consistent with grace. David, Heman, and Hezekiah, these were forsaken, yet were children of God. It is more incident to the godly, than to the wicked and carnal. "They have no changes," Psalm lv. 19. The carnal may be under bondage ; sometimes their peace may be troubled and disturbed, but this desertion is a disease incident to the godly, and none else ; they have a tender conscience ; when God is gone, how are they troubled ! But those that never felt the love of Christ, never knew what communion with God means, were never troubled with sin ; have none of this affliction. This is incident to the richest and most heavenly spirit, whom God hath taken into communion with himself.

For direction then to God's children. Observe God's comings and goings, see whether you are forsaken ; when God hides himself from your prayers ; when means have not such a lively influence ; when you have a strong affection to obey, but not such help to bring it into act, and you begin to stumble ; observe it, God is withdrawn, and many times seems to withdraw to observe whether you will take notice of it. Christ made as if he would go further, but his disciples constrained him to stay with

them ; so he often makes as if he would be gone, to see if you will constrain him to tarry.

Inquire the reason. "I commune with my own heart," Psalm lxxvii. 6. What then? "My spirit made diligent search." Aye, this is the time to make diligent search what it is that separates between God and your soul. Though God do it out of sovereignty and instruction sometimes ; yet there is ever cause for creatures to humble themselves, and make diligent search what is the matter. Submit to the dispensation, however painful ; murmuring does but entangle you more. God will have us submit to his sovereignty and wisdom before he has done. David refuses not to be tried, only he prays, "Lord, forsake me not utterly." Learn too, to trust in a withdrawing God, and depend wholly upon him ; to stay ourselves upon his name, when we see no light, Isaiah l. 10. Never leave until you find him. As Esther would go into the king's presence, when there was no golden sceptre held forth ; so venture into God's presence when you have no smile or countenance from heaven ; trust in a withdrawing God ; nay, when even wrath breaks out, when God killeth you, as Job says, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," Job xiii. 15. With such a holy obstinacy of faith should we at all times follow God.

When God seems to forsake us, and really does so in part, yet we should pray that it be not an utter and total desertion. "Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever : behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people," Isaiah lxiv. 9. 1. Do not despond. We are too apt to do so. "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favorable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Psalm

lxxvii. 7—9. The worst kind of despondency is to lie in sin. To lie in the dirt because we are fallen is foolish obstinacy. 2. Pray to God, acknowledging that we have deserved it. There is nothing which God has promised to perform, but we may ask in prayer. If thou provest me, let me not miscarry, if thou exercisest me, let me not be cut off. Beg his return. Give thanks that God is not wholly gone, certainly he is not, as long as you are desirous after him, and have a tender heart left. Though he hath withdrawn the light of his countenance, yet he hath left the esteem of it, a thirst after God, and a desire of communion with himself.

XI. God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform,
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines,
Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sov'reign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take !
The clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace ;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding ev'ry hour ;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan his work in vain ;
God is his own interpreter,
And he will make it plain.*

XII. The deeper our distresses are, the more is the power and grace of our God magnified in our deliverance. Not David raised to a throne, according to promise, but Jesus exalted to his Father's right hand, and manifested in the truth of the gospel, is our banner displayed ;— our means of victory and deliverance ; let us look to him and be saved. If sin has made deadly breaches, the sovereign grace of God can repair them. If we turn to him in prayer, we may expect his return in mercy to us. Having loved us freely, his right hand shall save us. Our deliverance may be delayed, but cannot be defeated. While Jesus subdues his opposers in mercy, or destroys them in wrath, let us make him our own, and every promised blessing of grace or glory will necessarily follow. When he pleases, he can make our bitterest enemies our warmest friends. Whatever difficulties then stand in our way, let faith overcome them. Though we seem cast off, let us cleave fast to the promise, and trust, and wait for the salvation of God. The greater our danger, our cries and our prayers ought to be the more earnest. Let us put no trust in human helps ; but in God's name and strength, encounter our spiritual or temporal enemies ; and so shall our victory be sure. Often are God's people overwhelmed with their sense of sin, their troubles, temptations and fears. But whatever we be, and in whatever condition, a throne of grace, and a prayer-hearing God, are at hand to apply to. Jesus, the

* John xiii. 7.

establishing and protecting rock, is near; and his word and Spirit are ready to lead us to him. Every former experience of protection or deliverance, ought to encourage our flight to this refuge. Our trusting to his promises, perfections, and providences, and our cordial worship of him here, will issue in our being for ever with him in his mansions of glory above.—God hears our prayers, and will provide for us everything good. We are heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Since Jesus reigns, for ever sits enthroned amidst mercy and truth, we may confidently expect to live and reign with him in everlasting bliss and praise. Patient and submissive resignation of our souls to him, is the certain mean of an happy issue of all our troubles. Christ is the alone author and finisher of our salvation. In so doing, corruptions and temptations may shake us, but cannot move us, either fully or finally, from grace. While liars and apostates meet with destruction from God, they, who trust in him, may defy hell or death to hurt them. Psalm xxxvii. 3—5. In him they are saved, secured, strengthened, and protected; and in him, not in themselves, do they glory. The more their faith in him is exercised, the stronger it becomes. The more we trust in ourselves, the creature, or worldly enjoyments, the more disappointment and hurt we shall meet with. But the more we depend on, cry to, or consider God, we shall find pleasure, safety, and comfort. The mercy and power we see in him, shall be employed to furnish and protect us, and to defend us from all our enemies. For what a dry and barren wilderness is this world, with nothing in it that can satisfy the longings of a gracious soul! And, the more we find of the emptiness of created enjoyments, the more we should fly to the fulness of God, as *our* God,

and all-sufficient portion. They, who have experienced fellowship with him, and discoveries of his glory in ordinances, will feelingly regret the loss of them, and ardently desire the re-enjoyment of them. But great is the mercy, that God himself, the fountain of happiness, and his throne of grace, are ever accessible to the poor and needy, that seek the water of salvation. And if he refresh our hearts with the tokens of his favor, they ought to be enlarged in his praise. Happy and delightful is it, to be able to meditate on a remembrance of his former lovingkindnesses ; and in his strength, to follow him closely in the means of grace, and paths of his commands. It is his help and favor only, that can tune our hearts to praise him, while we enjoy his protection. Dreadful will be the destruction of the enemies of Jesus Christ and his people ! But eternal shall be the safety, unspeakable the joys, of him and his ransomed children, while all their malicious enemies shall be filled with astonishment, and struck into endless silence and confusion.

XIII. To such as feel themselves under God's correcting hand. If they see not how they can be delivered, they should not despair. But put on patience, and look through the thick cloud. After darkness comes light. "Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." Own God's hand in your affliction, and lay it not on instruments. Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Thus justify God in all things, for it is fit it should be so. Desire rather that affliction may be sanctified than removed ; pray more to be fitted for deliverance, than released from the trouble; underrate not your mercies ; get faster hold of God by faith and prayer. Still own God as a father, and he will own you

as a child ; glorify God in the fire, and say, “ Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”

Then, though God’s hand be heavy upon you, and none can deliver you from it, yet is he a Father still ; though perhaps offended, yet he is not a sin-avenging judge : this would be dreadful ! Compare 2 Samuel xxiv. 14, with Hebrews x. 31. His scourging as a father is a branch of the gospel covenant. As none can deliver you out of God’s correcting hand, so none can pluck you out of his fatherly hand ; our Lord Jesus thus testifies both of himself and his Father, who, he says, is greater than all, John x. 29. While you are in his hand he never looks off from you, you are engraven on the palms of his hands, and he takes special care of you in his providence. Remember, if you are never delivered out of God’s hand of affliction here, death will set you at liberty. There are two choice cordials, 1 Cor. x. 13, to assure you that you shall be enabled to bear your affliction, and that in due time you shall have a way to escape.

Let the children of God be animated and encouraged in their sufferings from God, and for God. Though they may be sharp and long, and no human help can avail to rescue them, God can and will, and they may say as the three children, “ If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king,” Daniel iii. 17. The Lord will deliver them by his hand of mercy, out of the hand of justice, yea, from the evil work of sin in the soul, and will preserve them unto his heavenly kingdom. They must walk by faith, and not by sight ; study the promises, be much in prayer, reflect on past experiences, sanctify God’s name, learn obedience by what they suffer under God’s hand, and they will in the issue find that all

things work together for their good, though they cannot discern it for the present. Happy souls, who trust in God, and live by faith in evil times !

XIV. Fainting under chastisements reflects dishonorably upon God. It is true, in some respects, those who are extremely dejected, are not so guilty as despisers ; for usually they acknowledge the justice of his providence. But that false conception of the Father of mercies, either that he willingly afflicts the children of men, or that he hates them because he afflicts them here, is so contrary to his holy and merciful nature, so injurious to his goodness, 1 John iv. 8, the special character of his nature, that it is an equal provocation, with the slighting of his sovereignty.

XV. In our perplexing difficulties, we ought to recur to the first principles of our most holy faith. And never should we lose sight of God's kindness to those, who are washed in the blood, and sanctified by the Spirit of his dear Son. Often the strongest believers are most violently tempted, and dragged to the very brink of death and destruction. While God, in this world, marks his enemies and friends in the most perplexing manner ;—whom he hates he prospers to their ruin ; and whom he loves, he corrects and scourges for their profit ; what need have we to attend closely to his word as our rule ; and amidst astounding providences, wait in faith and patience till we see the end of the Lord ! The worst that a believer hath, is better than the greatest prosperity of the ungodly ; which but ripens them for everlasting ruin, and hastens them into it. But to whatever sad lengths the afflictions and temptations of God's people draw them, they will issue in their

instruction, humiliation, comfort, and holiness. When rebellious or murmuring thoughts arise in our hearts, they must be carefully resisted and quickly suppressed. We must never grieve nor stumble God's people, by representing his service as hard and unprofitable. And it is not the strongest carnal reasoning, but fellowship with God in his word and ordinances, that can enlighten a darkened soul, or disentangle it from an ensnaring temptation. Great is the mercy of God, when he relieves his children, who had by their fretfulness become their own tormentors; and that even at their very worst, he never ceases to look upon them in his Son, to attend and support them, as weak infants in his family. But bright views of God and eternal things, are sometimes ushered in by great darkness and bitter trouble of mind. Holiness here, and glory hereafter are closely connected. And little reason hath one guided of God, and an heir of everlasting happiness, nay of God himself, and joint heir with Christ, to envy the earthly prosperity of the ungodly. How insignificant do all other things appear, when compared with the everlasting enjoyment of the INFINITE ALL, the REDEEMING GODHEAD!! How light and easy are death and trouble, when considered as our way to it! While the enemies of God hasten towards endless perdition, his children should by faith depend on his promise, that here and hereafter their lips may be filled with his praise.

XVI. Jesus, thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds in these array'd,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

When from the dust of death I rise
To claim my mansion in the skies,

E'en then shall this be all my plea,
Jesus hath lived and died for me.

Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who ought to my charge shall lay?
Fully thro' thee absolv'd I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

Thus Abraham, the friend of God,
Thus all the armies bought with blood,
Saviour of sinners, thee proclaim;
Sinners, of whom the chief, I am.

This spotless robe the same appears,
When ruin'd nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue;
The robe of Christ is ever new.

O let the dead now hear thy voice!
Now bid thy banish'd ones rejoice!
Their beauty this, their glorious dress,
Jesus, thy blood and righteousness.

XVII. What days of trouble have God's people to endure, from temptations, corruptions, afflictions, and desertions! But in deep distress, we must flee to the compassionate bosom of our God, who spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for his elect, and pour out our complaints before him. And, if we would speed, we must be both importunate and unwearied in our applications at the throne of grace. If we but speak in groans, God can understand us, and will answer. But often, under strong trials, God's people feed their sorrows, and reject the consolations which God suggests to them in his word; often they indulge the melancholy apprehension that he hath forsaken

them, and left them to everlasting perdition. Terrible then is their case, and dishonorable to God is this their distrust. But hopeful is the appearance, when they are brought to condemn their own unbelief, (that master-sin, that staid the compassionate hand of Jehovah-Jesus at Nazareth, Mark vi. 5, 6,) when they are led to cast themselves wholly on his almighty power and mercy; and when they continue meditating on, and declaring his former mighty works of providence or grace. This awakens them and others to honorable thoughts of his conduct, and to thanksgiving, however deep and mysterious the dispensations of his providence! For "The Lord is righteous in all his ways, holy in all his works," Psalm cxlv. 17, even the most terrible of them. And, however awful, they are infinitely gracious; and issue in the deliverance of his chosen from their manifold bondage, and in their guidance, by Jesus their great leader and priest, to the Canaan above.

XVIII. Above all, I would say to the christian, never distrust the kindness, the love, the wisdom, the faithfulness of your Saviour; but confide in him, who has promised all things shall work together for your good. Though you may not now know what he is doing, you shall know hereafter. You will see the reasons of all the trials and temptations, the dark, the comfortless hours, the distressing doubts and fears, the long and tedious conflicts, with which you are now exercised; and you will be convinced that not a sigh, not a tear, not a single uneasy thought was allotted to you, without some wise and gracious design. Say not then like Jacob, "All these things are against me;" say not like David, "I shall one day perish;" for all these things

are for your good, and you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of Christ's hand. Why should you, who are sons of the King of heaven, be lean and discontented from day to-day? Remember, if you are justified, you are the heir of an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Be not discouraged at the small progress you appear to make, or the difficulties you may meet with.—Why should the infant be discouraged, because he has not the strength of manhood, or the wisdom of old age? Wait on the Lord in the diligent use of his means, and he will strengthen your hearts, so that you "shall mount up as on eagles' wings; you shall run and not be weary, you shall walk and not faint." Who is he "that walketh in darkness, and hath no light?—Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."—Let him go to Jesus, the compassionate Saviour of sinners, who heals the broken in heart, who gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom. Go, I say, to him, tell him all your griefs and sorrows; tell him that your souls cleave to the dust; that iniquities, doubts and fears prevail against you; that you are poor and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked. Go to his mercy-seat, where he sits as a merciful high priest, on purpose to give repentance and remission of sins; go, and embrace his feet, lay open your whole hearts, state all your difficulties, complaints, and disorders, and you will find him infinitely more willing to grant your requests, than you are to make them. He is love itself. It is his very nature to pity.—Have you a hard heart? Carry it to Jesus, and he will soften it. Have you a blind mind? He will enlighten it. Are you oppressed with a load of guilt? He will take it off. Are you defiled and polluted?

He will wash you in his own blood. Have you backsidden? "Return," says he, "ye backsiding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Come, then, to Christ, and obtain those influences of his Spirit, by which you will be enabled to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; so shall your path be "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

XIX. Why doth your face, ye trembling souls,
Those mournful colours wear?
What doubts are these, that waste your faith,
And nourish your despair?

What tho' your sum'rous sins exceed
The stars that fill the skies,
And aiming at th' eternal throne,
Like pointed mountains rise.

What tho' your mighty guilt beyond
That wide creation swell,
And has its curs'd foundation laid
Low as the depths of hell.

See, here an endless ocean flows
Of never-failing grace;
Behold a dying Saviour's veins
The sacred flood increase.

It rises high, and drowns the hills,
Has neither shore nor bound;
Now if we search to find our sins,
Our sins can ne'er be found.

Awake, our hearts, adore the grace
That buries all our faults,
And pard'ning blood, that swells above
Our follies and our thoughts.

XX. Great is the mercy, that God is the shepherd, leader, and protector of his people—that he is a God reconciled in Christ, to the everlasting wonder of angels, and of men. Awakened souls ardently desire reconciliation to God by his grace, and to receive undoubted manifestations of his favor. And if we are turned to God by his grace, we cannot fail to inherit his eternal glory. But through seeming rejection of prayers, and angry frowns from him, and through tears, griefs and reproaches must we sometimes go thither. With what kind care did God of old settle the Israelites in Canaan, and make them flourish there ! With how much more did he gather, found, and increase his gospel church ! But, alas ! the misery and ruin that sin draws down upon the best constituted churches and nations ! Enemies, furious as wild beasts, waste them when God withdraws his protection. Yet the design hereof is not his people's ruin ; but to excite their prayers, quicken their repentance, and magnify the wonders of his power and grace in their deliverance. It is impossible for his people to be ruined, when their help is laid on the Almighty Redeemer, the man of God's right hand. John x. 28. God's regard to him, is the source of all their salvation, quickening, and perseverance in grace. Through him strengthening us, we can do all things. Ought not then prayer to be the daily employment of such as are spiritually alive ? And ought we not rather to desire earnestly a sense of God's favor, than the removal of any affliction ?

XXI. The best way to ease the heart in trouble, is by seriously consulting God's word. It is not good altogether to pore upon our sorrows. David doth not merely sit down and bemoan the calamities of his condition, and

so sink under the burden, but runneth to the word of God. As husbandmen when their ground is overflowed by waters, make ditches and water-furrows to carry it away; so when our minds and thoughts are overwhelmed with trouble, it is good to direct them to some other matter. But every diversion will not become God's people, it must be an holy diversion. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul," Psalm xciv. 19. "Thy comforts,"—of God's permission, of God's providing, comforts proper for such as professed godliness. The worldly, in trouble, run to sinful enjoyments, and so defeat the providence rather than improve it. But David, who was God's servant, must have God's comforts. So elsewhere when troubled at the prosperity of the wicked, he says, "I went into the sanctuary, then I understood their end," Psalm lxxiii. 17. He goes to divert his mind by the use of God's ordinances, and so comes to be settled against the temptation.

Among all sorts of holy diversions, none is of such use as God's word. There the afflicted child of God will find matter enough to allay his cares and fears, swallow up all his sorrows, and direct him in all his straits. In short, here he will find comfort, as well as counsel.

1. Comfort. The word teaches us to look off from men to God, from providence to the covenant, from things temporal to things eternal: as Moses feared not the wrath of the king, when he saw him that is invisible. Heb. xi. 27. "If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perversion of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter; for He, that is higher than the highest, regardeth; and there be higher than they," Ecc. v. 8. There is an higher judge that sitteth in heaven; and if he pass sentence for us, when they pass sentence against us, we need to be less trou-

bled: if he give us the pardon of our sins, and wash our conscience in his own blood, it is no matter what men may say against us. For "Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies." Is not God able to bear you out in his work? Look off from providence to the covenant. Providence is a deep mystery; we shall not be able to understand it, until we gather principles by faith from the covenant. "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," Heb. xiii. 5. God overrules all for good. Rom. viii. 28. Look off from things temporal, to things eternal. "For our light affliction, that is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal," 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

2. For counsel. A christian should not be troubled so much about what he should suffer, as what he should do, that he may do nothing unseemly to his calling and hopes, but be kept blameless to the heavenly kingdom. Now the word of God will teach him how to carry himself in dangers, to pray for persecutors, (fire is not quenched with fire, nor evil overcome with evil) how to keep himself from unlawful shifts and means, how to avoid revenge, lying, flattery, yielding against conscience, fainting under trouble, or waxing weary of well doing; it will teach him not to fight against Satan, or his instruments with their own weapons, for so we shall be easily overcome. The ungodly

shall not be so wise to contrive mischief, as the believer, instructed by the word, to carry himself under it. "Through thy commandments thou hast made me wiser than mine enemies," Psalm cxix, 98. Malice and policy shall not teach them to persecute, so as God's word shall instruct him to behave himself in the trouble.

The word must not be slightly read, but our hearts must be exercised in the meditation of it. A cursory reading will not work upon us so much as serious thoughts. In all studies, meditation is both the mother and nurse of knowledge, and so it is of godliness, without which, we do but know truths by rote, and hearsay, and talk one after another, like parrots. But when a truth is impressed upon our hearts by deep meditation, then it worketh with us, and we feel its power. Musing makes the heart to burn, Psalm xxxix. 3; serious thoughts are the bellows that blow it up. In a sanctified heart, the seeds of comfort come to maturity by meditation; by constant meditation our affections are quickened, this turns the promises into marrow. "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,—when I meditate on thee in the night watches," Psalm lxiii. 5, 6. It gives more than a vanishing taste, which mere professors only have.

In all your troubles then, learn this method, to cure them by gracious means;—by prayer and meditation. Meditation on the word of God will tell you that we are "born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward," Job v. 7; and therefore we should no more think it strange to see God's children molested here, than to see a shower of rain fall after sunshine, or that night shall succeed the day. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, as though some strange thing happened unto you," 1 Peter iv. 12. It were strange if it were otherwise.

Our waymark is many tribulations. "We must through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God," Acts xiv. 22. Afflictions too, though in themselves legal punishments, fruits of sin, yet by the grace of God, they are medicinal to God's people. "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world," 1 Cor. xi. 32. We never advance more in christianity, than under the cross. "They verily for a few days chastened us, after their own pleasure ; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness," Heb. xii. 10. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted ; that I might learn thy statutes," Psalm cxix. 71.

Rather, then, endure the greatest calamities, than commit the smallest sin. "Choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," Heb. xi. 25. A meek suffering, conduces much to God's glory. 1 Peter iv. 14. Your aim should be to do nothing unworthy of his presence in you, and the truth you profess.

XXII. Hark, my soul, it is the Lord ;
 "Tis thy Saviour, hear his word ;
 Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee ;
 "Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou me ?"

I deliver'd thee when bound,
 And, when bleeding, heal'd thy wound ;
 Sought thee wand'ring, set thee right,
 Turn'd thy darkness into light.

Can a woman's tender care
 Cease towards the child she bare ?
 Yes, she may forgetful be,
 Yet will I remember thee.

Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above ;
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death.

Thou shalt see my glory soon,
When the work of grace is done ;
Partner of my throne shalt be,
Say, poor sinner, lov'st thou me ?

Lord, it is my chief complaint,
That my love is cold and faint ;
Yet I love thee, and adore,
O ! for grace to love thee more.

XXIII. If Christ loved us when he washed us in his own blood, then no slaying providences can separate us from the same love : so that we may, considering the matter aright, say, he loved me when he hurried me hither and thither ; when he brake my bones, emptied me from vessel to vessel, made me as the mire of the street. Yet his blessing, once bestowed, can never be revoked ; nor his eternal love change. Though his paths are in the deep, and his ways and judgments past finding out, while he maintains in our souls a cry after him, which is the voice of his own spirit interceding in us ; he hath not forgotten to be gracious nor caused his bowels to cease from yearning towards us. Sin only makes outward burdens intolerable. Outward troubles declare the venom of sin, and tend to open the ear to instructions ; and so both of them send the souls of the redeemed to the atonement of Christ's blood for healing, and into his bosom for refuge. Certainly his promises are as good now as they were before the storm arose upon us ; and the covenant of grace and love, and goodwill smiles as much as ever ; and when the cloud is

blown over and gone, we shall see it. Now to justify God's truth, and submit to his wise hand; to maintain good and honorable thoughts of him, and all his dealings, when so many things from without and also from within do war against it; this is like the faith of God's elect, and doth in some blessed measure betoken the knowledge of what God is in himself, and what he is eternally to us, and that the seed of God remaineth in us. Let us leave ourselves in his hands, trusting in him for wisdom and strength, to carry us through. Say to him, Lord, heal us and purge us. He will do it, and all will be well. Let us hold on in prayer, "for the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry," Hab. ii. 3.

XXIV. The name of God, and what is in God, should be foundation sufficient for faith to rest upon in the utmost extremity of distress. The name of God, that is, God's attributes, and Christ's righteousness do sufficiently and fully answer all our wants and fears; all objections and distresses we can have, or can be in; whatsoever our want or temptation be, He hath a name to answer it. For example—to take that his name in pieces, mentioned Exodus xxxiv. 5, 6; consider every word in that his name, and every word answers to some temptation that may assault us.

First, art thou in misery and great distress, he is **MERCIFUL**; The **LORD** merciful. The **LORD**, therefore able to help thee, and merciful, therefore willing.

Yea, but secondly, thou wilt say I am utterly unworthy, there is nothing in me to move him to it; well, therefore, he is **GRACIOUS**. Now grace is to show mercy freely. Yea, but I have sinned against him long, for

many years: if I had come in when I was young, mercy might have been shown me. To this he says, I am **LONGSUFFERING**. Yea, but my sins every way abound in number, and it is impossible to reckon them up, and they abound in heinousness: I have committed the same sins again and again; I have been false to him, broken my promise with him again and again; his name also answers this objection, he is **ABUNDANT IN GOODNESS**; he abounds more in grace, than you in sinning; and though thou hast been false again and again to him, and broken all covenants, yet he is **ABUNDANT IN TRUTH**, he is better than his word, for he cannot to our capacities express all that mercy that is in him for us. Yea, but I have committed great sins, aggravated with many and great circumstances, against knowledge, wilfully:—then he forgives **INQUIRY**, and **TRANSGRESSION** and **SIN**; sins of all sorts—crimson, yea, and scarlet sins, Isaiah i. 18. Yea, but there is mercy thus in him but for a few, and I may be none of that number; yes, there is mercy for thousands, and he **KEEPS IT**; treasures of it lie by him, if men would but come in and take them.

Object what thou canst, his name will answer thee. Needest thou **COMFORT** as well as **PARDON**? He is both **THE FATHER OF MERCIES**, and the **GOD OF ALL COMFORT**, that is his name, 2 Cor. i. 3. Needest thou peace of conscience, being filled with terrors? He is the **GOD OF PEACE**, 1 Thess. v. 23. Yea, but I have an heart empty of grace and holiness, and full of corruption; He is the **GOD OF ALL GRACE** to heal thee, as well as of peace to pardon thee. Needest thou wisdom and direction? He is **THE FATHER OF LIGHTS**, as the apostle says, James i. 17. Is thy heart inconstant, and full of double-mindedness? He is **UNCHANGEABLE** also, as he speaks there, James i. 17. Thus all the objections that can be made,

may be answered out of his name ; therefore it is all-sufficient for faith to rest upon.

The same may be also fully gathered out of his son's name ; in whom God hath made himself strong to show mercy, and bestow all good gifts. His name is adequate to God's name, that is, is of as large extent in worth and merit, as God's heart is in his purposes of showing and bestowing mercies. His name hath likewise an all-sufficiency in it to supply all our wants and desires, and to satisfy all our scruples. For example—THAT his name mentioned by the prophet Isaiah, ix. 6, compared with 1 Cor. i. 30. For would we have peace of conscience, and the guilt of sin removed ? He is the PRINCE OF PEACE, and is made RIGHTEOUSNESS to us. Are we in depths of distress, terrors within, terrors without, out of which we see no redemption ? He is the MIGHTY GOD, ABLE TO SAVE TO THE UTTERMOST, being made REDEPTION to us. Want we grace, and his image to be renewed and increased in us ? He is the EVERLASTING FATHER ; a Father to beget his likeness in us, and EVERLASTING, to maintain it ever, when it is once begun ; He is made SANCTIFICATION to us. Want we wisdom to guide us ? He is the COUNSELLOR, and is made WISDOM to us. All we want he hath ; even as all he hath we want ; and further, although we not only want all these, but never so much of all these, his name is also WONDERFUL. For such he is in all these ; “able to do above all that we ask or think.” Or if the soul desire more distinct and particular satisfaction in point of justification, which consists in the pardon of sins and acceptance to the favor of God, it being the point which in this state of desertion is questioned, and wherein the soul desires satisfaction, that other name of his, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, Jer. xxiii. 6, will answer all objections

and doubts that our hearts can raise. For if that righteousness of his, satisfied God, who in condemning us is greater than our hearts, then surely it may satisfy our hearts much more. The righteousness of his life and death is not only an adequate ransom, 1 Tim. ii. 6. But there is **PLENTEOUS REDEMPTION** in it, Psalm cxxx. 7. Yea, to superfluity, as the apostle's phrase implies, 1 Tim. i. 14; that is, **OVERFULL**, more than would serve the purpose, and that to pardon his sins, who **WAS THE CHIEF OF SINNERS**, 15. He elsewhere challenges all the powers of sin, hell, and darkness to appear in this dispute, and undertakes to answer them all out of this one position, which he lays as a foundation truth, "**CHRIST HATH DIED**," Rom. viii. 34, which is in effect the same as this, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**. "Who is he that condemneth?" What can be alleged either in the heinousness of sin in the general, or in any of thy sins in particular, unto which an answer may not hence be given, from the righteousness of his life and death? Is it that sin is an offence against the great God? **AGAINST THEE, AGAINST THEE, &c.**, as David says: and is not His righteousness, the righteousness of Jehovah? **JEHOVAH** our righteousness, who is the **MIGHTY GOD**. Is the glory of this great God, and all his excellencies debased by us in sinning? And will not the emptying of his glory, whose name is the brightness of the Father's glory, in performing this righteousness for us, satisfy and make amends? Are our sins the transgression of the holy and righteous law in every part? and did not Jehovah, who gave and made that law, to make himself our righteousness, **MAKE HIMSELF UNDER THE LAW**? Gal. iv. 4; and to make up a **FULL** righteousness, **FULFIL** every part of it, Rom. viii. 3, 4. Is it thy continuance in sin, and the number and the

iteration of them that amazeth thee? ALL FULNESS DWELLS IN HIM, who is our righteousness, Col. i. 19, and hath dwelt in him, longer than sin in thee. And the righteousness of our Messiah, is an EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS, Dan. ix. 24. The merit of which, an eternity of sinning could not exhaust, or make void. And is all this righteousness laid up for himself only, or for any other sort of creatures, so as thou mightest never come to have an interest in it? No! The height of our comfort is, that OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, is one WORD of his Name, and that our names are put into his. FOR US it is, and OURS it is ordained to be. OURS, not for himself, he had no need of it, being God blessed for ever. OURS, not the angels', for they are justified by their own; nor the bad, they are put out of God's will for ever. But OURS, who are the sons of men; and among them, who are broken, lost, whose souls draw near to the grave, and their lives to the destroyers, Job xxxiii. 22; and who come and pray unto God, and stay themselves upon it: unto them God cannot deny it, for it is theirs: for he will render to man "His righteousness," Job xxxiii. 26. So that his Son's name is all-sufficient to answer all objections for faith to rest upon: "so that they that know his name will put their trust in him," Psalm ix. 10.

A second reason why his name is sufficient, though you have and see nothing in yourself, nor any promise made to any grace in you to rest upon, is, because even all those promises made to conditions in us, which we ordinarily look to, are YEA, and AMEN only in this his name, and his Son's name. THAT is the original of them all, the root, the seed of them all; his name is the first matter of all those secondary promises, his name gives being to them all; if it were not for the mercy, grace,

truth, kindness in him, and the righteousness which is in his Son, all the promises which are made, what were they worth? As the worth of a bond depends upon the sufficiency of the man who gives it, so do all these promises upon his name. Therefore, now, when you rely upon his name, having as yet no promise made to anything in yourself to rely upon, you then trust on that which is the foundation of all those promises; you then have recourse to the original, which is more authentic than extract copies; you rely on that, which all those other are resolved into, and therefore is sufficient, though all the rest fail you in your own apprehension.

Thirdly, his mere name is support enough for faith, and may be so, because it is for his name's sake, and his Son's name's sake, he doth all he doth: and for nothing in us, but merely for what is in himself. So Isaiah xlviii. 9, 11, "For my name's sake," &c. So also Ezek. xxxvi. 22, 32. For my name's sake, and not your sake. And again, Isaiah xlivi. 25, "I am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember thy sins." For it, he blotteth out transgression, and pardoneth it. And if it be for his name's sake, he doth all, and fulfillleth all promises made to us, then, when thou seest nothing in thyself, to which any promise is made, nothing which may appear to be any motive to pardon thee, then, trust those in that his name; that because he is God, and hath mercy in himself, that therefore he will do it. For that which is the only motive to God himself to do anything for us, must needs be (when apprehended and believed by us) the strongest and surest ground for our faith to rest upon, to persuade the heart that he will do it.

This, then, may direct poor souls in distress, what to venture all upon, upon what ground to hazard souls,

labours, endeavours, faith, repentance, obedience, and all upon his name. As David says, "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart," &c. Psalm lxxiii. 26. So I may say, your comfort in prayer, in hearing, your joys may be gone, your own graces and all promises made to them may seem gone; your own hearts may fail, and being creatures, they use to fail again and again: but God's name and his Son's name rested on, will never fail you. Lean on these, not by halves in distress, but trust "perfectly," as the apostle says, 1 Peter i. 13, "Hope to the end," upon that grace revealed. That is, cast your whole souls upon it. He only hath "perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on God," Isaiah xxvi. 3. Have not only half thy soul upon that "rock which is higher than thou," Psalm lxi. 2; but get all upon it, and when all fails, renew thy faith on his name. Thereon rest: there die. To this purpose may that of Solomon serve. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe," Prov. xviii. 10. Now what is the use of a tower in a city? Is it not when all the outworks are taken by the enemy, the walls scaled, the fortifications forsaken, houses left; then the tower holds out last, and is a refuge to fly to. So also when Satan and God's wrath beset thee round, and encompass thy soul, and the comfort of every grace in thee is taken from thee, and thou art driven from, and art forced to forsake all other thy holds and grounds of comfort, then fly to the name of the Lord, as thy city of refuge, Heb. vi. 18. Say, There is mercy in thee, Lord, and that is **THY NAME**, and there is righteousness in thy Son, and that is his name: and I am directed to trust in thy name in time of need. Here rest and catch hold, as on the horns of the altar, and if thou die, die there.

XXV. Immanuel's a friend in need,
Who shall the saints arraign ?
Before the throne he stands to plead,
And never pleads in vain.

He pleads—and who shall now condemn ?
Jesus, the victim slain,
Pleads for his own Jerusalem,
And never pleads in vain.

He pleads his own atoning blood,
His agonizing pain ;
He pleads the righteousness of God,
And never pleads in vain.

He stands before his Father's throne,
And claims an endless reign ;
Rejoice, ye saints, with Jesus one,
He never pleads in vain.

Sing then, ye saints, who shall condemn ?
Jesus, the victim slain,
Pleads for his own Jerusalem,
And never pleads in vain.

XXVI. There is nothing that the desponding soul, under the hiding of God's countenance needs more to be directed to, than waiting upon God, thus trusting in his name, in the constant use of all ordinances and means of grace. Waiting is indeed but an act of faith, further stretched out. Waiting upon God is but a continuing to believe on God, and to look for help from him, with submission, though he stay long ere he come. Waiting is an act of faith resting on God, and an act of hope expecting help from him ; an act of patience, the mind quietly contenting itself, till God doth come ; and of submission, if he should not come. Therefore, says the

church, being in this very case, "It is good to hope, and quietly to wait for the salvation of God," Lam. iii. 26. It is good indeed to do so: for God will afflict the less, ease you the sooner, and comfort you the more, when he doth come, and in the meanwhile it makes you to "possess your souls," and upholds them: to do otherwise, to be impatient, and to give over looking for the Lord, as Ahaz did, is the greatest folly, for, as Job says, chap. xii. 14, "He shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening." All the world cannot let you out; he keeps the keys of the dungeon, and you must stay his leisure; and he waits but for a fit time to let you out, Isaiah xxx. 18. He will wait to be gracious to you, for he is a God of judgment, a wise and judicious God, and knows the fittest times and seasons; that he stays so long, is not out of want of mercy, for he waits and longs to be gracious, but he doth it out of judgment, and his wisdom sees not yet a fit time; he is grieved as well as you, that you are not fit for mercy; that his mercy would not be exalted if he should show it, till you further see your misery; and, therefore, he says, "Blessed are all they that wait for him." And as he now waiteth but to be the more gracious to thee, so he did heretofore a long while wait for thee, that thou shouldst begin to turn to him and say, "When shall it once be?" Jer. xiii. 27. Thou madest him stay thy leisure in turning from sin, why may he not make thee stay his time for the pardon of it? And, indeed, the escaping hell in the end is so great a mercy, that it is worth waiting for all thy days, though thou endure an hell here, and get not one good look till the very last gasp and moment of thy life; therefore put thy mouth in the dust, and wait quietly, if there may be hope, at the last, Lam. iii. 29.

And waiting thus, go on to use all the means of grace

more diligently, more constantly, though thou findest a long while no good by them. Omit no ordinance which God hath appointed for thy comfort and recovery. As the woman in the scriptures, who had the bloody issue, spent all upon physicians, Luke viii. 48, in the use of meats for her recovery ; that trouble of mind only doth hurt you, that drives you from the means : therefore Satan endeavours nothing more, than to keep desponding souls from the word, from christian communion, from the sacraments, from prayer, by objecting to them that now all is in vain, and that you do thereby only increase your condemnation.

But, first, if thou learn no other lesson in the use of the means, but that thou art thyself most unprofitable ; and that, unless " God teach thee to profit," Isaiah xlviij. 17, no good is done, and thus learn to depend upon God in Christ in the ordinance, this, alone, is a great degree of profiting.

And, secondly, though thou shouldest forget in a degree all thou hearest, and seemest to reap no benefit by it ; yet, still hear, for some secret strength is gotten by it. And, as for increasing thy condemnation, know, that utterly to neglect and despise the means of grace is greater condemnation ; therefore, read, pray, meditate, hear, confer, forbear not these your spiritual meals. Indeed when the body is sick, you use to forbear your appointed food, but when the soul is sick, there is more need of it than ever. All these are both meat, medicine, food, cordials and all. Use reading the word : it is through comfort of the scriptures, that we have hope, Rom. xv. 4. Therefore, read them much : attend on preaching, for " God creates the fruit of the lips, peace," Isaiah lvii. 19. So also, receive the communion frequently, those days are often sealing days ; go to the

house of God, and confess thy sins, write over again thy pardon, put in all thou knowest of thyself, bring it to Christ to set his seal to it.

Only take this caution, that thou trust not to the use of the means, but unto God in the means ; many rest in the means, instead of looking through them to Christ. To think, Oh ! I shall have comfort by such a man, at such a time, in such an ordinance, is presumptuous. So, believe in God as if you used no means, and yet as diligently use the means, as if your sole confidence were in them.

XXVII. Let the whole race of creatures lie
Abas'd before their God ;
Whate'er his sov'reign voice has form'd,
He governs with a nod.

If light attend the course I run,
'Tis he provides those rays,
And 'tis his hand that hides my sun,
If darkness cloud my days.

When he reveals the book of life,
Oh ! may I read my name
Amongst the chosen of his love,
The follow'rs of the Lamb.

XXVIII. Upon trials a thousand times successfully repeated, we proclaim Christ the help of the helpless, the hope of the hopeless, the health of the sick, the strength of the weak, the riches of the poor, the peace of the distressed, the comfort of the afflicted, the light of those that sit in darkness, the companion of the desolate, the friend of the friendless, the way of the bewildered, the wisdom of the foolish, the righteousness of the ungodly, the sanctification of the unholy, the redemption,

of captives, the joy of mourners, the glory of the infamous—and, in a word, the salvation of the lost.

XXIX. St. Luke in the 18th. chapter of his gospel, says, “And Christ spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought **ALWAYS** to pray and not to faint.” And if *always*, when can prayer be more seasonable, than when the soul is ready to sink and give up all for lost under a sense of the divine displeasure? Then, above all things ought the stricken and smitten believer to pray himself, and get others also to pray for him; for God often restores comforts unto such at the request of mourners for them. Isaiah lvii. 18. But, yet, especially he should be earnest and fervent in pouring forth his complaints himself; for though the speaking of friends may somewhat further his suit, yet, it must be wrought out between God and himself alone in private, and his good will must be obtained by seeking him in secret. This counsel the apostle gives you. “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray,” James v. 13. And, because of all afflictions, this of darkness in a man’s spirit needeth prayer the most: therefore David pens a psalm on purpose, not for his own private use only, but for the benefit and use of all others in like distress, as appears by the title of it, Psalm cii. “A prayer for the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the Lord;” and this, says he, in another psalm, is my constant practice, “From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed,” Psalm lxi. 2. And so was it Christ’s also, for in his agony, “He prayed yet more earnestly,” Luke xxii. 44.

When then, at any time, thy sins and God’s wrath meeting in thy conscience, make thee deadly sick, as Isaiah speaks, i. 5; then pour forth thy soul, lay open and confess thy sin, and as it will ease thee, so it will

also move God to pity, and to restore comforts to thee again. Thus David, in Psalm xxxviii. 18, being in great distress, "I will declare my iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin;" and he makes it an argument to God to pardon him, Psalm li, when his bones were broken; "Cleanse me from my sin," verse 2. "For I acknowledge my transgressions," verse 3; and when he had confessed, verse 4—6, then he cries, "Make me to hear of joy and gladness," verse 8, and "restore unto me the joy of thy salvation," verse 12. And what was the main and principal motive which wrought most powerfully with him to confess and mourn? "Against thee, thee only;" he puts in twice as much of the consideration thereof, as of any other motive to make his heart mourn; *that* chiefly, if not only, melted, dissolved him. Let the same also chiefly work with thee. "Against thee, thee, have I sinned," thus oft, thus grievously, thus presumptuously; against thee a God so great, and yet withal so good, so kind, so willing to receive, and pardon; if my heart were as willing to turn unto thee. And when thy case is as Job's was chap. x. 15—17, that thou art full of confusion, so full that thou thinkest thy heart could hold no more; and yet it "increaseth," and he fills thee fuller still; then do thou pour out thy complaints to him, as he pours in confusion into thee; and when he hunts thee, as Job complains, like a fierce lion, fall down and humble thyself like a poor and helpless lamb: if thou die, die at his feet, mourning, bleeding out thy soul in tears; and when he hunts thee up and down, and pursues thee with blow after blow, follow thou hard after him wherever he goes, Psalm lxiii. 8, with complaint after complaint: and when yet he leaves thee not, but again and again returns, as some read it, after some intermission, and shows him-

self terrible day after day, night after night, yet do thou look still again and again towards his holy temple, as Jonah did, chap. ii. 4; and when he begins to bring in new sins, new accusations against thee, "thou renewest thy witnesses," Job x. 17; and when thou thoughtest he had done with thee, he bringeth forth new rods, and enters into new quarrels, and reckonings long since past and forgotten (as it is in the same verse), vicissitudes and armies of disquietudes; and when one army is overcome, another appears in the field; then fall thou down upon thy knees and say, as Job does at last, "I have sinned, I have sinned, what shall I do unto thee, O thou Preserver of men?" These and these abominations have I done, and I cannot undo them, and what shall I do to recover thy favor? Alas! nothing that can satisfy him. Only confess thy sins, accept thy punishment. Go and strip thyself therefore, and with all submission present a naked back to him, and though every stroke fetch not blood only, but well nigh thy soul also, yet complain thou not of him; be still, say not a word, but such whereby thou utterest thy supplications, and acknowledgest thine own demerits, and his justice, if he had sent ten thousand times more. Say as Micah vii. 9, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." Bear witness that it is in his mercy thou art not consumed, and cut off by every blow; and the heavier he lays on, struggle thou not, he will let thee go the sooner; the higher he lifts up his hand to strike, the lower let thy soul fall down. Humble yourself under his mighty hand, and still kiss the rod when he hath done. And then take up words of pleading for thyself; it is for thy life! Desire him to remember what have been his thoughts from everlasting, "thoughts of peace and mercy to us-ward,

and the number of them cannot be told," Psalm xl. 5, which he hath ever been thinking, and with the greatest of delights, as one that was in his bosom and was his counsellor, his own dear Son tells us, Prov. viii. 30. Plead with him as other saints have done. What are now become of all these thy thoughts of mercy? Are they restrained? What! are all now on a sudden forgotten? Isaiah lxiii. 16, laid aside, which thou hast been thinking on so long? Ask him if he has forgotten his own name? Psalm lxxvii. 9. To be gracious and abundant in kindness, it is his name, Exodus xxxiv. 6. Remind him of the infinite and all-sufficient righteousness in his Son, laid up in him, and that by his own procurement, whereof his Son never had, nor ever can have need himself, (being God blessed for ever). And for whom then was it appointed? But for the sons of men, those who are weary and heavy-laden, wounded, sick, broken, lost. These his Son hath put into his will, who still lives to be his own executor. Remind him too, that his Spirit is the comforter, a God of comforts; that his Son is anointed with this Spirit on purpose to pour him forth into the hearts of those that are meek, broken-hearted, and mourners; that he is the physician for the sick, and that the whole have no need of him. Yea, and if it be said unto thee, Thou art utterly unworthy. Answer, He professeth to love freely. If the greatness of thy sins be objected against thee, plead thou again, that plenteous redemption is with him, Psalm cxxx. 7. And, if he have not enough to pardon thee, say, thou art content to go without. If thou art ungodly, plead, that thou believest on him that justifies the ungodly. If he put thee off as Christ did the woman of Canaan for awhile, and say he hath no need of thee, then plead thy need of him, and that thou

canst no longer live without him ; for in his favor is thy life, and that without it thou art undone. If he seem to rebuke thee, that thou darest thus to press upon him, who is the high and lofty one ; a sinful man to him, whose name is holy, remind him that he himself hath said, "For thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place : with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones," Isaiah lvii. 15. And further, be bold to tell him there are few in the world that seek him, and if he should turn away any that do, he would have favor, for who would fear him, if there were not "mercy in him," Psalm cxxx. 7.

If he still pursue thee, and his wrath lie heavy on thee, ask him what he aims at ? Is it a victory, "and to overcome when he judgeth ?" Freely tell him thou art willing to give it him, to yield to him, to stand out with him in nothing, but art content to submit to his commanding will in all things, and to his condemning will also, if so he please. Justify him, whilst he is condemning thee, and say that at the last day, he shall need no other witness against thee than thyself. Only, beseech him to consider what honor it will be to him ; to "pursue the dry stubble, or break a leaf driven to and fro," Job xiii. 25. Hath he not said, "I will not contend for ever ?" Isaiah lvii. 16, especially when he sees any one lay down his weapons as thou art content to do.

Ask him, is it that he aims to have glory out of thy eternal condemnation in hell ? Tell him, it is true, he may ; and that it is some comfort to thee, that he may have glory out of thy death and destruction, who never yet had it out of thy life ; but yet desire him to consider

this, before he thrust his sword into thee, that he first sheathed it in the heart of his Son : plead that thou art never able to satisfy him, though he should cast thee down to hell ; and what profit therefore, will there be in thy blood ? And, therefore, if satisfaction to his justice be his end, he might better accept that which his Son made him, and so he shall be sure to be no loser by thee ; and thereby he will not only receive the glory of his justice, but show forth the riches of his grace and mercy also, and so double the revenue of his glory in thee. Or is it that he aim at more obedience from thee than heretofore he has had ? Plead that this is the way at present to disable thee from service, for that while thou sufferest his terrors, thou art as one among the dead, distracted with terrors, Psalm lxxxviii. 15. So that the powers of thy soul are scattered and dissolved and cannot attend upon their duty ; and besides this distraction in thy spirit, it consumes thy strength also, dries up thy bones and moisture. Ask him, as David did, " Remove thy stroke away from me : I am consumed by the blow of thy hand. Oh ! therefore, spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more seen," Psalm xxxix. 10—13. And withal, put him in mind that if he should go on thus to deal with thee, it will cut short thy days : " Remember how short my time is !" says David. And further, tell him, that for that little time here allotted thee in the world, the more joy thou hast, the more service thou shalt be able to do him. " For the joy of the Lord is your strength," Neh. viii. 10. And therefore entreat him to restore to thee the joy of his salvation.

And if light and mercy yet come not, but still God seems, as it were, to cast thee off ; then call to mind if ever thou hast had any true communion with him ; and

then begin to challenge him, (as the church does, Isaiah lxiii. 16; when his mercies were restrained to her, she says, "yet doubtless thou art my Father," how strange soever thou makest thyself to me). And if thou shouldest discern no grace in thyself, yet desire him to look into thy heart, and be bold to inquire of him, if he can see nothing there, which he himself hath written, never to be blotted out. And for thy comfort know, that when thou canst not read it, (thy graces being much blotted) yet he can read his own hand, and will not deny it.

Thou mayest yet be bolder. Yea, desire him to look into his own heart, and therein to view those secret ancient thoughts he bore towards thee from all eternity. And if at first he seems yet silent still, then desire him to look upon thee, and ask him if he hath not known thee, and taken thee for his own from everlasting? Tell him, thou darest refer thyself wholly to what passed between him and his Son concerning thee. Appeal to Christ as thy surety, and a witness thereof for thee, who was privy to all his counsel, whether thou art not one of those, he gave unto him with a charge to redeem and save? And if that Christ did not bear thy name written upon his heart (as the high priest the names of all the tribes on his breast-plate), when he hung upon the cross, and when he ascended up on high?

And yet, if after continual praying thus, thou find still no comfort, no answer from him, but he seems rather even to shut thy very prayers out, as Psalm xxii. 2; then expostulate with him, as David did, "Why shuttest thou out our prayers, and will not hear us pray?" Psalm lxxx. 4. For alas! (thought he) we have nothing else to help us in the time of need, but prayer. And if, through all these discouragements, thy condition only prove worse and worse, so that thou canst not pray,

but art struck dumb when thou comest into his presence, as in Psalm lxxvii. 4, "I am so troubled that I cannot speak;" then groan, sigh, sob, as Hezekiah did, bemoan thyself for thine own unworthiness, and desire Christ to speak thy requests for thee, and God to hear thee for his sake; for Christ is an advocate with the Father, 1 John ii. 1, nor was ever cast in any suit he pleaded.

And, if still after many years he own thee not, but it still grows darker and darker, even till thy death approacheth, or to such extremities, that he seems to thee to cast thee off for ever. Then in the midst of such depths, down on thy knees once more, and bless him for all those glorious excellencies of holiness, kindness, grace, and wisdom that are in him, the beauty of which first took thy heart, though thou shouldest never be the better for them. Bless him for all the mercies he shows to others, by which they have occasion to magnify him, although thou shouldest be found unworthy of the least of his mercies. Bless him for those who shall ever live with him, who stand about his throne, and see his face, and enjoy his presence. What sins thou thinkest thou shalt be condemned for by him, condemn thyself for first, and still ask forgiveness for them. What mercies thou hast tasted of from him, confess thyself unworthy of, and thank him though thou shouldest never partake of any more (such dispositions as these in such extremities do often appear in the hearts of God's children), and desire him that he would preserve good thoughts of himself in thee, that thou mayest not blaspheme his holy name. And when thou art sinking into hell in thine own apprehension, see if he calls thee not back again.

Look what he himself saith, Jer. xxxi. 18—20, "Ephraim is my son, my dear son," and yet he began

to speak against him, as sharp and bitter words as ever he hath spoken against thee ; and looked sternly on him, upon which Ephraim bemoans himself, as I have taught thee to do ; and being yoked, (as thou art), to tame him, he acknowledges it was justly done, having been “a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke.” And Ephraim began to be ashamed, confounded, not able to look up, for sinning against God, and seeks repentance, and that from him, without whose help he was not able to turn to him, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned,” and to challenge him and his eternal love, “Thou art the Lord my God.” Well, says God, though it be long since, “I spake against him,” and I have suffered him long to lie thus plunged in misery, yet “I remember him still, and my bowels are troubled for him.” “I will surely have mercy on him.”

XXX. Happiness, thou lovely name,
 Where's thy seat, O tell me were?
 Learning, pleasure, wealth and fame,
 All cry out “It is not here :”
 Not the wisdom of the wise
 Can inform me where it lies,
 Not the grandeur of the great
 Can the bliss, I seek, create.

Object of my first desire,
 Jesus crucifi'd for me !
 All to happiness aspire,
 Only to be found in thee :
 Thee to praise, and thee to know,
 Constitute our bliss below ;
 Thee to see, and thee to love,
 Constitute our bliss above.

Lord, it is not life to live,
 If thy presence thou deny ;

Lord, if thou thy presence give,
 'Tis no longer death to die :
 Source and Giver of repose,
 Singly from thy smile it flows ;
 Peace and happiness are thine ;
 Mine they are, if thou art mine.

Whilst I feel thy love to me,
 Ev'ry object teems with joy ;
 Here, O may I walk with thee,
 Then into thy presence die !
 Let me but thyself possess,
 Total sum of happiness !
 Real bliss I then shall prove ;
 Heav'n below, and heav'n above.

XXXI. We are all by nature alienated from the life of God; we are without God in the world; we have no fear of God before our eyes; God is not in all our thoughts, although God infinitely deserves our constant remembrance; and God himself is perpetually exciting us to remember him. He says to us by his word, and by all his works, "Behold me, behold me!" Conscience often addresses us in his name; and often addresses us in vain. God pours a profusion of beauties around us, in order that we may be perpetually reminded of him. "The ox knoweth his master's crib; but we do not know, we do not consider." We consider not that he gives us our corn, and wine, and oil. What does he then? He employs other methods, which he would not employ, if we did not force them upon him. And what are these? "I will go and return unto my place, till they acknowledge their offences, and seek my face. In their affliction, they will seek me! God determines that, what we have disregarded, we shall doubly feel. He removes intervening objects, that HE may be seen; and

he causes a death-like silence, that HE may be heard. He strikes away our earthly hopes, and then holding out his own divine arm, he says, Lay hold upon that ; lean hard, it will never give way. He withers our hopes, and spreads desolation around us. Then, showing us heaven, he says, There is a country ; arise and depart hence, for this is not your rest. He destroys every drop of water in our vessels, in order that we may be compelled, either to perish of thirst, or to inquire after Him, the fountain of living water.

And, it is well if we remember him, and inquire, “Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night ?” Thus it was with Manasseh : in his affliction he sought the Lord God of his fathers, and he was found of him. It was thus with the prodigal, in the parable ; when he began to be in want, he said, “I will arise, and go to my father.” How many have done this since ! What was it led them to the Saviour in the days of his flesh ? Can you mention one instance, in which prosperity, or indulgence, ever led an individual to him ? What was it then ? It was distress. It was this that led the nobleman to him—this led the ruler—this led the Centurion—this led Martha and Mary to send to him, saying, “Lord, he whom thou lovest, is sick.”—Your soul is cast down ; then remember his wisdom—he knows your soul in adversity—he knows what kind of discipline you require—he knows how to deliver the godly, and how to make all things work together for your good. When your soul is cast down within you, remember his GOODNESS ; he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men : there is a need be for these dispensations. Did your fathers chastise you for their pleasure, or your profit ? If you question whether he withholds anything for want of disposition to indulge,

look at the cross ; see what he has given you already ; remember that “he spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all ; and will he not with him also freely give us all things” that are necessary for our welfare, now that he takes pleasure in the prosperity of his servants ? When your soul is cast down, remember his **WORD** :—

“ Had not thy word been my delight
When earthly joys were fled,
My soul oppress’d with sorrows’ weight
Had sunk among the dead.”

How many are there, that can truly say, “This is my comfort in my affliction ; thy word hath quickened me,” Psalm cxix. 50. What provision you may find here ! What promises do we find here ! How suited to our own case ! All-sufficient for our relief !—As your day is, so shall your strength be,—your feet shall be shod with iron and brass,—all these promises are yea, and amen in Christ Jesus.

When your soul is cast down within you, then remember His **COVENANT**, as David did in his personal, and especially in his relative afflictions. “ Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure ; this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.”

When your soul is cast down, then remember his **PROVIDENCE**. Think of him, “ who is about your path, and about your bed, and acquainted with all your ways ;” who performeth all things for you. See him in the midst of your fears, as the manager, caring for you with infinite wisdom and kindness. Remember him without whom a “sparrow falls not to the ground,” and who

“numbers the very hairs of your head.” It was thus that David was enabled to act according to this resolution, “O my God, I will remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites,” &c.; and did act when he came to Ziklag, and found his house burnt, his property destroyed, and his relations carried away by an infamous banditti. He lifted up his voice, and wept, although he was a brave man—(heroism is always tender). Some natural tears he shed, but soon wiped them away; and we have it immediately added—“David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” Well, said he, “He is my portion and my refuge in the land of the living; therefore will I hope in him.” Thus you are to remember his power—his wisdom—his goodness—his word—his covenant—and his providence.

Call to memory what God has done for you as the God of providence and grace, and let it teach you to say, “Amen,” to all his dispensations. Christians having tried God’s kindness, his faithfulness, and his power, ought, therefore, to be able to trust him. It shows us our duty, and our privilege—not only to notice God’s appearances for us at the time, but also to treasure them up in our minds, that we may often recur to them. For they were intended not only for our immediate relief, but to be cordials against our future faintings;—and where is the christian that will not have some of these during his passage through the wilderness of this world? You will do well, then, to look back, to reflect on those seasons, wherein God has peculiarly appeared for you, or in which he has indulged you:

His love in time past forbids me to think,
He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review,
Confirms his good pleasure to help me quite thro’.

Christians, then, will in God's light, see light. They will feel their obligations to him. They will know, and acknowledge from the heart, that all his ways have been mercy and truth to them. They will adore and praise HIM, who has saved their souls from death, and their feet from falling away. They may now say, my waiting days, my watching days, my weeping days, my praying days, will soon be past ; but my desire is, that my days of praise may

ne'er be past,
While life, and thought, and being last,
Or immortality endures.

XXXII. Christians resemble those followers of Gideon, and subduers of the Amalekites, who are represented in scripture, as " Faint, yet pursuing ! "

1. They faint. This is not surprising, for consider, First—The enemies they have to vanquish.

Bodily appetites—filthiness of spirit—a depraved nature—all sin and error—the present evil world—the Devil and his angels. Think of the qualities of these adversaries, also, their number—malignity—power—policy—success. Heroes, statesmen, princes, philosophers, divines ;—myriads have been enslaved, and destroyed by them. Who does not faint ?

Then the length of the service—not for a season, but for life. There is to be no parley—no truce—no cessation of watching—praying—praising—abounding in the work of the Lord.

And lastly—the occasional difficulties—the road rough and thorny—the weather sultry and oppressive—refreshments interrupted, and sometimes wholly cut off. A wound from without, or an indisposition from within.

This is the case, more or less, with every christian.

But,

2. They pursue. The life of the christian is a life of contrasts. Cast down, and not destroyed—dying, and behold he lives—faint, yet he pursues. There is much to perplex, but much to encourage him.

There is something in himself. There is a principle of divine grace implanted. That which is divine, is durable and invincible—that which is born of God, overcometh the world.

There is much to encourage him in his cause. It is a good warfare. Conscience must approve it. Angels applaud it. It is the cause of truth—of righteousness—of glory.

Then there is much in his leader and commander. It was said, that it was unbecoming in a Roman to fear, while Cæsar was alive. It is more unworthy of a christian soldier to fear, while Christ is alive. Greater is he that is in us, than he that is against us. O! think of his wisdom—his power—his success.

Again, there is the certainty of the issue. Nothing is so doubtful as the result of a battle. But the christian enters the field under peculiar advantages. He fights not uncertainly: with all his weakness, he wins the day, and is in all things more than conqueror. And what will be the result of success? The rewards of the world's warriors are poor and mean compared with it. He that overcometh, shall inherit ALL THINGS.

XXXIII. Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And gird your armour on;
Engage your enemies,
Let ev'ry fear be gone:
Now take the field, the fight renew,
And never yield,—“tho' faint, pursue.”

Come, feed on heav'nly bread,
'Twill make you strong to fight;
God will supply your need,
And put your foes to flight:
His arm is strong, his word is true,
Ye saints, go on,—“tho' faint, pursue.”

Wage war with ev'ry foe,
For God is on your side;
Let all the nations know
That you in God confide;
Gird on your sword, the fight renew,
Look to the Lord,—“tho' faint, pursue.”

Tho' sin, and death, and hell,
Your heav'nly march oppose;
Fear not, it shall be well;
God will confound your foes;
Go on, ye saints, the fight renew,
And Gideon like,—“tho' faint, pursue.”

Ne'er lay your weapons down,
Till death shall close the strife;
Till you receive the crown
Of everlasting life:
On God depend, the fight renew,
As Gideon conquer'd, so shall you.

XXXIV. Believers have that word of Christ fulfilled to them, “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” But, then, in due time, they find it as true, “In me (that is in Christ) ye shall have peace.” It is certain that inward peace can be had nowhere else. In Christ alone that jewel is to be enjoyed. ’Tis good that things below do frown when they force a child of God to retreat, and shelter himself in the bosom of Him, whose love and good will is everlasting. We have but one care to spend

our thoughts most about—to rest with joy in the **WILL** of God ; seeking his glory ; endeavouring after more of Christ's image to be renewed in us : and so with faith and patience to breathe after that deliverance that will put an end to sin and trouble. Afflictions are then prosperous, when they are blessed with a right instruction, and weaning efficacy ; and, are useful to render the excellency of things not seen more precious and desirable : when they make a soul to search and pray much, and so forsake the world, then they are wholesome medicine. This is that frame we all should aim at : and who can help us in this great work, but He that has promised that he will never quench the smoking flax, till he have brought forth judgment and righteousness to victory.

My spirit looks to God alone,
My rock and refuge is his throne :
In all my fears, in all my straits,
My soul on his salvation waits.

Trust Him, ye saints, in all your ways ;
Pour out your hearts before his face :
When helpers fail, and foes invade,
God is our all-sufficient aid.

XXXV. A converted man, without afflictions, is ready to place his trust, and seek his comforts in temporal things. Earthly desires crowd upon him, filling his soul with vanity ; and he cannot well taste the comforts of God's word, but under the burden of the cross. Here we often enjoy more solid joy than if we were without the cross. And then, Jesus Christ verifies his declaration, Matt. xi. 30, “ My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Thus our hearts are set against the world—reconciled to trials—raised up to heavenly things,—and easily separated from

many idols, to which we clung before. Well, then, may we bear these wholesome burdens, which, when sanctified, will produce present comfort, and soon issue in eternal rest and glory. And, since the Lord has promised to give **STRENGTH SUFFICIENT FOR THE DAY**, that we may not be tempted above measure, there is abundant reason to acknowledge that, “His burden is light” indeed.

XXXVI. Afflicted saint, to Christ draw near,
Thy Saviour’s gracious promise hear ;
His faithful word declares to thee,
That, “as thy days, thy strength shall be.”

Let not thy heart despond, and say,
How can I stand this trying day ?
He has engaged, by firm decree,
That, “as thy days, thy strength shall be.”

Thy faith is weak, thy foes are strong,
And, if the conflict should be long,
Thy Lord will make the tempter flee,
For, “as thy days, thy strength shall be.”

Should persecution rage and flame,
Still trust in thy Redeemer’s name ;
In fiery trials thou shalt see,
That, “as thy day, thy strength shall be.”

When call’d to bear the weighty cross,
Or sore affliction, pain, or loss,
Or deep distress, or poverty—
Still, “as thy days, thy strength shall be.”

When ghastly death appears in view,
Christ’s presence shall thy fears subdue :
He comes to set thy spirit free,
And, “as thy days, thy strength shall be.”

XXXVII. Spiritual life is preserved only by repeated trials, which gives us an humiliating experience of our deep sinfulness, and an encouraging experience of the powerful and rich mercy of the Lord, that rises above all our infirmities, relieves all, heals all, pardons all. Thus, “tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope.” What man is he in whom we find a steady courage without rashness and without boasting? The soldier who has gone through many a campaign, and has grown old amid the fatigues of war? What trees are the strongest, and have the hardest wood? Those which have grown among the rocks, and amid the tempest? In whom do we find the christian life most vigorous, and christianity most practical? In whom do we find the most genuine humility, the deepest acquaintance with the deceitfulness of the heart, the most unshaken confidence in the promises? In those who have passed through most trials and conflicts, who have been most frequently humbled, who have felt what we are in sickness, in painful separations, in persecution, in distress of mind, and in temptations of every description. These coming out of “great tribulation” have often for the first time discovered their inbred corruptions, and their impotence for everything that is good; these speak not unadvisedly with their lips, nor venture to boast themselves of to-morrow. They go softly, humbly, with caution, Ezek. xvi. 63. Yet at the same time, through the grace of God, with firmness: knowing by experience in whom they have believed, and what are the unlooked-for resources, which God affords his people in the day of trial, they can say with David, “O God, who is like unto thee? Thou, which hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of

the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side," Psalm lxxi. 19—21.

Those to whom God has often appeared to show himself severe, and who have frequently been deprived of the light of his countenance, are also those, who, when they have again found that light, and have seen happier days rising upon them, feel best the whole value of that "peace of God, which passeth all understanding," and cling most firmly to him of whose presence they had been so long bereft. It is such that can say, with the spouse in the book of Canticles, "I found him whom my soul loveth, I held him and would not let him go," Cant. iii. 4. In a word, the whole tenor of christian experience proves, that it is by frequent bitterness of soul, followed by deliverances, that a man has the life of his spirit: a subject of great consolation to those who often pass through such tribulations! These afflictions, which at first sight appear to them "grievous and not joyous," shall afterwards, when they have "been exercised thereby," produce in them "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." Let them cheer up, and learn to wait; better days will come, when the remembrance of their past afflictions shall be the life of their spirit. The Lord says to them, as to the spouse in Hosea, "Behold I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her." Thus saith the Lord, by another prophet, "Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord," Jer. xxxi. 16, 17.

As on a serene day there arises in the horizon "a little cloud like a man's hand," which in a short time covers the heavens, veils the light of day, and brings the "sound of abundance of rain, and a tempestuous

wind ;" so oftentimes, by the will of God, there comes upon us a bitterness, which suddenly troubles the peace of our souls, spreads over us, as it were, a veil of sadness, and excites violent storms in our hearts ; so that we can say, "for peace I have great bitterness." Let us never forget, that while we are in this world we are in the region of tempests ; and let us never calculate on a long season of rest. It is especially when we slumber in a time of calm ; when we say, "peace and safety" by ceasing to watch ;—it is then especially, that we have reason to expect from the Lord, who loves us, some squall to awaken us. Too long a peace is not good for our souls ! "through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of heaven." Hence we ought, in a certain sense, "to rejoice with trembling ;" we ought to be like soldiers who wait for the battle, "and to put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand in the evil day." Let us fear to be like the people of Laish, "who dwelt careless, quiet and secure, because there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in anything," Judges xviii. 7 ; and who, in the midst of their security ! were surprised by the enemy, who found them undefended, and utterly destroyed them. On the other hand, when great bitterness comes upon us, let us never think it is without remedy, but let us be persuaded, that if we flee to the Lord, we shall soon be enabled to say, "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption." It may sometimes seem as though our foot had slipped on the verge of the abyss, and we were rolling from temptation to temptation, from one degree of weakness to another, and from one degree of unbelief to another, even to the bottom, and falling into the pit of corruption. We then seem to feel the last breath of life on the

point of expiring in us ; and in our despondency, are ready to say, "my strength and hope are perished from the Lord." But at the same moment, a powerful hand coming to our relief, when there is none else to help us, seizes us and holds us back. We find that we are surrounded and embraced by the everlasting arms. The power and mercy of our God bring us up out of the horrible pit : he sets our feet upon a rock, and places us there in security. We ought, then, never to say, I have sunk too deep for the Lord to raise me up. And, as in peace we ought to expect trials, so, in our trials we ought not to despair of deliverance.

All mercies begin at the cross of Christ, and take their rise from the pardon of sin. Let us, then, ever regard our reconciliation to God by the blood of Christ as the first of mercies, and as that from which all others flow ; and let us assure ourselves of this, by believing in him "who justifieth the ungodly." What can we ask of God with confidence, so long as we are not reconciled to him ? On the contrary, with what boldness can we ask anything of him, when we are assured that he has cast all our sins behind his back ? We can then adopt at all times, that reasoning at once so simple, and so conclusive ; "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered himself up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?"

Observe also the force of the expression, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back," Isaiah xxxviii. 17. We see not what is behind us. Such then is the position which our God is pleased to assume towards us in the covenant of grace ; he regards us as perfectly righteous, because "the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Our sins have disappeared from his view. He himself has cast them behind his back, and in this

sense, "he beholds not iniquity in Jacob, neither doth he see perverseness in Israel," Numb. xxiii. 21. His church, which he hath sanctified and cleansed for himself, appears unto him a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, Ephes. v. 27.

Observe too, it is said, "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back;" all, not some, not a great part, not almost all, but **ALL**, yea, all, without exception. This the word of God constantly asserts. It tells us, that "with the Lord there is plenteous redemption, and that he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities," Psalm cxxx. 7, 8. In Jeremiah, the Lord makes this glorious promise, "I will cleanse them from all iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me," Jer. xxxiii. 8. The prophet Micah expresses himself in similar terms, when he says, "he will subdue our iniquities, and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The apostle Paul declares, that these promises have been accomplished in Christ. "And you being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you *all* trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances, that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross," Col. ii. 13, 14.

O ! my brethren—my poor companions in the sin and misery entailed by Adam ! let not your unbelief retrench aught from the mercies of God :—let it not diminish the consolation which the word **ALL** contains, when applied to the pardon of sins. "All my sins ;" that means, in the language of the God of truth, the sin of my whole life past—in thought, word, and deed ; sins known, and

sins secret; vile, degrading, odious, inexcusable sins: sins, which excited my own indignation; such sins as, perhaps, I durst not avow to any one; repeated sins, continual falls; monstrous tissue of rebellion, selfishness, hypocrisy, and pride;—in a word, all that can be conceived most frightful in number, and in enormity: all that can confound the imagination, overwhelm the conscience; astonish the sinner himself, amazed at his own iniquity. All this, and nothing less than this, constitutes “**ALL MY SINS**;” and this is what God has cast behind his back; what he forgets, pardons, remembers no more; when I bring them, with sincerity, and with repentance, to the foot of the cross. Nothing short of this is the grace of God: the pardon which he offers me—the pardon which I need. If only one, yes, only one of my sins be excepted; if it be not blotted out, this single sin presses upon my soul like a weight; torments me, condemns; subjects me to the curse denounced against him that “continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” That the gospel should be glad tidings to me; that it should set my heart at liberty: and that it should give joy to my soul, it must be presented to me such as that God has given it, who abundantly pardons: it must be that gospel in which Jesus tells me that, “all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men:”—that gospel, in which it is declared, on his part, “that by him all that believe, are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses,” *Acts xiii. 39.*

My brethren, I repeat it once more, let us not retrench aught from the mercies of God: let us not make him a liar. Since He has said **ALL**, let us believe that it is **ALL**; and let us say, with assurance of faith, “He has cast all my sins behind his back.” However great the mercy of

God may be, it is not too great for us ; and if we take anything from it ; and if the word ALL do not signify literally ALL for us, then there is no peace for our souls. "The bed is shorter than that we can stretch ourselves on it ; and the covering narrower than that we can wrap ourselves in it," Isaiah xxviii. 20. Let us, then, believe with a sincere confidence in the whole mercy of our God : let us rejoice in his promises ; let us cast ourselves upon our face on the ground, adoring the love of Christ, which passeth all understanding ; and let us ask of the Lord a heart which shall respond to that love.

Here, we only remark, that in order to be able to enjoy the consolation which the assurance that God has cast all our sins behind his back, affords ; we must, by a sincere confession of them, place them, with humiliation, both before our own eyes and his : for it is written that, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from unrighteousness, 1 John i. 9. Before conversion, and in the painful time which often follows it, the sinner excuses his sins, hides them, dissembles, and does not bring them with openness to the foot of the cross ; then, by a just punishment, it seems to him that his sins come up again before God, and he can say with Moses, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance," Psalm xc. 8. But, as soon as the sinner becomes sincere ; as soon as he ceases to flatter himself, and his iniquity presents itself as a hedge about him ; as soon as he lays open his sins before God, just as they are, and without any disguise, immediately he feels that the pardon of his sins is applied anew to his conscience, and that the Lord casts behind his back those transgressions, of which the sinner himself can say, I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is

ever before me ! Would you then habitually feel that God casts all your sins behind his back ? Place them continually before you, and before Him, in a spirit of humiliation and repentance.

XXXVIII. It is the Lord—enthron'd in light,
Whose claims are all divine ;
Who has an undisputed right
To govern me and mine.

It is the Lord—should I distrust,
Or contradict his will,
Who cannot do but what is just,
And *must* be righteous still !

It is the Lord—who gives me all—
My wealth, my friends, my ease ;
And of his bounties may recal
Whatever part he please.

It is the Lord—who can sustain
Beneath the heaviest load :
From whom assistance I obtain
To tread the thorny road.

It is the Lord—whose matchless skill
Can, from afflictions raise
Matter, eternity to fill,
With ever-growing praise.

It is the Lord—my cov'nant God,—
Thrice blessed be his name !
Whose gracious promise, seal'd with blood,
Must ever be the same.

And can my soul, with hopes like these,
Be sullen, or repine ?
No, gracious God, take what thou please,
To thee, I all resign.

XXXIX. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards." And so far are believers from being exempted, that scripture tells us, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." We shall not describe them, we shall only inquire after the temper with which they are to be borne. It is not necessary to be insensible. There is no virtue in bearing what we do not feel. Grace takes away the heart of stone, and patience does not bring it back. You may desire deliverance; but these desires will not be rash, insisting, unconditional; but always closed with, "Not as I will but as thou wilt." You may employ means to obtain freedom; but these means will be lawful ones. A suffering christian may see several ways of release, but he seeks only God's way. "He who confined me shall bring me forth; here will I stand to see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show me." He would rather endure the greatest calamity than commit the least sin: and while the affliction remains, there is no rebellious carriage, no foaming expressions, no hard thoughts of God, no charging him foolishly. He calming acquiesces in a condition, of the disadvantage of which he is fully sensible; his patience keeps him in the medium between presumption and despair—between despising "the chastening of the Lord, and fainting when rebuked of him"—between feeling too little and too much. "Affliction comes to exercise and illustrate our patience." "The trial of your faith worketh patience." It does so in consequence of the divine blessing, and by the natural operation of things; for use makes perfect; the yoke is rendered easy by being worn; and those parts of the body which are most in action, are the most solid and strong. And therefore, we are not to excuse improper dispositions under affliction, by saying, "It was so trying, who could

help it?" This is to justify impatience by the very means, which God employs on purpose to make you patient. Be assured the fault is not in the condition, but in the temper. *Labour* therefore to display this grace in whatever state you are, and however afflicted you may be. Impatience turns the rod into a scorpion. Till you wipe your eyes from this suffusion of tears, you cannot see what God is doing; and while the noisy passions are so clamorous, his voice cannot be heard. Suppose you were lying on a bed of pain, or walking in the field under some heavy affliction; suppose you were alone there, and heard a voice, which you knew to be the voice of God, say, "Do not imagine your case is singular. There has been sorrow like unto thy sorrow." Take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. You have heard of the patience of Job. He was stripped—yet he said, "the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." "What! shall we receive good at the Lord's hands, and shall we not receive evil?" Consider the unparalleled sufferings of thy Saviour. But he said, "The cup which my Father giveth me to drink shall I not drink it?"—Do not imagine these trials are fruits of my displeasure:—"as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." I design thy welfare; and I know how to advance it. You have often been mistaken; and sometimes you have been led to deprecate events, which you now see to have been your peculiar mercies. Trust me in this dispensation: reasons forbid my explaining things fully at present: "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." These troubles are as necessary for thy soul, as the furnace for gold—medicine for thy body, as the knife for the vine. Be not afraid of the affliction;

I have it completely under my management ; when the end is answered I will remove it. I know how and when to deliver. Till then, “fear not, for I am with thee : be not dismayed for I am thy God ; I will strengthen thee : yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” O could I hear this ; this would hush every rebellious sigh, this would check every murmuring thought. Is this then supposition ? Has not God said all this ? Does he not say all this in his word ?

Patience too must be exercised under all delays. We as naturally pursue a desired good, as we shun an apprehended evil : the want of such a good, is as grievous as the pressure of such an evil ; and an ability to bear the one, is as needful a qualification, as the fortitude by which we endure the other. It therefore as much belongs to patience to wait, as to suffer. We read of “the patience of hope,” for patience will be rendered necessary according to the degree of hope. “Hope deferred, maketh the heart sick.” It is the office of patience to prevent this fainting : and God is perpetually calling for the exercise of it. He does not always immediately indulge you with an answer to prayer. He hears indeed as soon as you knock, but he does not instantly open the door ; and to stand there, resolved not to go without a blessing, requires patience, and patience cries, “Wait on the Lord ; be of good courage ; and he shall strengthen thine heart ; wait, I say, on the Lord.” He does not appear to deliver us according to the time of our expectation ; and in woe we number days and hours. The language of desire is, “O when wilt thou come unto me ?” and of impatience, “Why should I wait for the Lord any longer ?” but patience whispers, “It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” To long for pardon, and

to feel only an increased sense of guilt; to implore relief, and to be able only to say, "Without are fightings, and within are fears;" to journey in a weary land, and see the way stretching out immeasurably before us, lengthening as we go; to pursue blessings which seem to recede as we advance, or to spring from our grasp, as we are seizing them—all this requires "patient continuance in well doing." "We have also need of patience, that after we have done the will of God, we may receive the promises." See the christian waiting patiently year after year in a vale of tears for an infinite happiness! See the heir of such an inheritance resigned to abide so in indigence! Surely it is trying to be detained so many months at anchor off the fair haven, with the end of his *voyage* in view; to have all the glory of the unseen world laid open to the eye of faith; the trials of this life to urge, and the blessings of another to draw; to have earnest to ensure, and fore-tastes to endear. Surely there is enough to make him dissatisfied to tarry here. And it seems proper for the christian to be more willing to go. Should an Israelite fix on this side the promised land? Is he not commanded to arise and depart hence? Can he love God, unless he wishes to be with him? Does not the new nature tend towards its perfection? What wonder, therefore, if we should hear the believer sighing, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. I would hasten my escape from the stormy wind and tempest." Oh when shall I come and appear before God? Oh when shall I leave the dregs of society, and join the general assembly above? When will my dear connexions, gone before, receive me into everlasting habitations? O how I envy them! O the glories of yonder world! I seem indistinctly to see the

shining prize. But a voice cries, "Be patient, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." And the resigned believer answers, "I pray not that he should take me out of the world, but keep me from the evil." "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change come." "Here is the patience of the saints," Rev. xiv. 12. Let us learn, then, how necessary it is to possess this temper of mind; it is of perpetual and universal use. All need it, and will need it always. We do not all need genius, learning, wealth—but what will you do in a world like this, without patience? How can you be prepared for a succession of encounters, unless you "take to yourselves the whole armour of God?" How can you pass through a wilderness of thorns and briars, unless "your feet be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace?" Who can say, "My mountain stands so strong I shall never be moved?" "If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many: all that cometh is vanity," Eccles. xi. 8. In a state where so little is left to choice and convenience, and where we are liable to trials and changes every day, we should seek after a general preparation for our passage, and strengthen and invigorate the soul by—patience.

Labour strenuously, not only to acquire this grace, but to excel in it. Seek higher degrees of it. Exercise it, not in one thing, but in everything; and in everything to the end, "Let patience have its perfect work; that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." There is a God of patience, who giveth more grace. Approach him with enlarged desire, that you may abound in this grace

also; "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto **ALL** patience, and long suffering with joyfulness."

And remember, you will not always be called to the exercise of patience. Your "warfare will soon be accomplished." "Yet, a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." A little more patience, and the "wicked shall cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest." A little more patience—and farewell provocation, affliction, and anxious delays. Patience, having conducted you safe, and being no longer necessary, shall return no more: but it will leave you in a state where all shall be peace, all shall be quietness, all shall be assurance for ever. "O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard: for thou, O God, hast proved us; thou hast tried us, as silver is tried: we went through fire and through water; but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place," Psalm lxvi. 8, 10, 12.

XL. Who is the weak believer, who
Doth still his dreary way pursue,
Inspir'd with awe and godly fear,
And seeking Christ, with heart sincere?
Obedient to thy Saviour's voice,
Yet canst thou not in Him rejoice,
Or taste the comforts of his grace,
Or find a God, who hides his face?

Jesus is vanish'd from thy sight,
No glimpse of bliss, or gleam of light
To cheer thee in the desert way,
Or promise a return of day;
No evidence of things unseen,
But wars without, and fears within;
No witness of thy sins forgiven,
No ray of hope on this side heav'n!

Poor tempted soul, what canst thou do ?
Hope against hope, that God is true ;
His nature in his name confess,
His wisdom, power, and righteousness :
The Lord, whom now thou canst not see,
Whate'er He is, He is for thee ;
Expect, and thou shalt surely prove,
That God in Christ is perfect love.

Till then, on Him thy spirit stay,
Whose death hath borne thy sins away ;
Conform'd to Jesus in his blood,
With Him cry out—“ My God, my God !
My God, my God, I hold thee fast,
Till nature's latest pang is past ;
Into thy hands my soul resign,
And then—thou art for ever mine.”

XLI. I do not doubt, but the same God, who has made communion with himself sweet to you ; will gather you under his wings, and perfect in you the good pleasure of his will. What a majestic privilege is this, that the omnipotent God should voluntarily be in the nearest covenant with a poor sinner ! That Christ, God-man, should be our priest, our advocate, and every hour of the day and night alive to make intercession for all those who come to God through him. What ! though great temptations come, and sore tempests arise : he did, doth, and can, still say to the storms, “ Be still,” and they must all obey him. Strong is our Redeemer, and therefore the floods cannot drown a weather-beaten vessel ; yea, he is both ship and pilot, and therefore the venture cannot miscarry. Who is it keeps the small grain—the little spark of faith alive, but he who made Jonah in the deep to say, “ Yet will I look again towards thy holy temple.” Our whole care and burden lies upon his

hands, "who bears up the pillars of the earth." He lives to give and nourish faith, and, in believing to give peace. Therefore, sin shall not have utter dominion, nor condemnation find room to enter. He is bringing us through many waters, to a safe shore. The victory ordained and promised, will break forth, because our head is exalted above all authority and power. We may look all manner of deaths and damps, all manner of disappointments, discountenances, and difficulties here below, in the face, without an appalled heart, and amazing terror; because the prince of life and deliverance has engaged his life, his crown, his dignity, to be the hope and strength of his poor servants. Happy is that soul that makes him his only and continual refuge: the days of an anxious pilgrimage are running out. The Lord direct our eyes to that serene and unchangeable state, where sins, fears, and temptations, turmoils, and difficulties will cease for ever.

XLII. God is a righteous judge; in all the judgments and chastisements which he inflicts upon his believing people, they cannot blame his severity; he warns before he punishes; his trumpet sounds before his rod smites them. When he condemns wicked men, their mouths shall be stopped; "Thou wilt overcome, when thou judgest," says David; Psalm li. 4. He does not wrong them; for they will only receive according to their works.

He is a "righteous Father," when He chastises his own people, He does not wrong them; He measures, and proportions his stripes, not unto their sins, but unto their strength; deals with them tenderly, and suitably to their cases and conditions; to purge them, not to destroy them. "He has a rod for the cummin, and a

staff for the fitches, and a wheel for the bread-corn," Isaiah xxviii. 27, 28. His rod is fitted to the condition of weak men, 2 Sam. vii. 14,—"He knows our frame; he remembers we are but dust," Psalm ciii. 14,—"that our strength is not the strength of stones, nor our flesh of brass," Job vi. 12,—"that we dwell in houses of clay, which are crushed before the moth," Job iv. 19; and, accordingly, he does in very faithfulness afflict, to refine, not to consume us. Yea, when his judgments are secret, yet they are righteous. When wicked men are the fan, and his people the corn; when the weeds flourish, and the corn is over-topped; when "the wicked devoureth the man, that is more righteous than he;" when the affairs of the world seem to be out of course, and every man out of his place; all this while the Lord makes way for the revelation of his righteous judgments. His work will be beautiful in its time. All things will work together for good, as materials in a building, ingredients in a medicine, Rom. viii. 28. The prosperity of the wicked will work to his ruin, Prov. i. 32. The affliction of the righteous will work to his glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17. Thus, righteous in his judgments, neither God's enemies nor his children, shall ever have cause justly to complain against him. For he is righteous in his covenant and promises. If he should have dealt with us according to our provocations, we had been consumed, Lam. iii. 22; but he has remembered his gracious promise to us in his beloved Son, that "whosoever believeth in him, should not perish," John iii. 16; and therefore we are preserved. Though our sins have forfeited mercy, yet his truth and faithfulness have fulfilled it. We owe not our remaining, we owe not our escaping unto any goodness of our own, but unto the grace of the covenant

alone. God's truth and fidelity unto his people that are in covenant with him, are the true ground of all their safety. He doth not change, Mal. iii. 6: therefore we do not perish, who otherwise from the days of our fathers are gone astray. His mercies are "from everlasting to everlasting," Psalm ciii. 17; from everlasting in predestination, to everlasting in glorification. He gave "grace, and promised eternal life, before the world began," 2 Tim. i. 9; before they were extant, or had any being (further than in the purpose of God), on whom the grace was bestowed, to whom the life was promised. And what he did from eternity purpose, he will not in time revoke; for "his gifts are without repentance," Rom. xi. 29. He doth, by his faith and fear, preserve his people through his power unto that mercy which he hath from eternity given them, Jer. xxxii. 40; 1 Peter i. 5. Of themselves, they fall dangerously and frequently from their own steadfastness; and then the Lord doth chastise their wanderings with the rod of a Father, but doth not utterly take away his lovingkindness.

The covenant and grace thereof, is free and absolute, not conditional, and suspended upon the unstable will of man. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy," and sheweth it on whom he will, Rom. ix. 15—18.—Between God the Father indeed, and Christ, as a second Adam, the transaction of the covenant was wholly conditional. He was to take from his Father a commission in our nature, to lay down his life, and to take it up again; to fulfil all righteousness; to be made sin for us; to have our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace laid upon him, before he could see of the travail of his soul. Yea, he undertook not only for his own

work, but for ours. By the preciousness of his blood he purchased; and out of the plenitude of his Spirit, he supplieth unto us whatever grace is requisite unto our salvation. But I say, as to us, the grace of the covenant is thus far free and absolute, that no duties are required of us, which are not as branches of the same covenant bestowed upon us. He hath promised to give a new heart, and to put a new spirit within us—to take away the stony heart out of our flesh, and to give us an heart of flesh—to put his Spirit within us, and to cause us to walk in his statutes—to save us from all our uncleanness—to cleanse us from all our iniquities, Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27, 29, 33. And, though he there tells us, that he will be “inquired of by the house of Israel, to do these things for them,” verse 37; yet we know, it is he only who poureth out the Spirit of grace and supplication, whereby we make this inquiry of him, Zech. xii. 10. True, indeed, it is, that when we believe, it is we only that believe; and when we work, it is we that work; but our working is not the cause of his grace, but his grace the cause of our working: and, therefore, the apostle saith, “I laboured more abundantly than they all,”—to note that the labour was his—“yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me,”—to note, that the power was God’s, 1 Cor. xv. 10. “Thou hast wrought all our works in us,” saith the prophet, Isaiah xxvi. 12. The works are ours, the strength is thine. Ours the heart and the hand that act; thine the spirit and grace whereby we act. He doth not withhold his love, till our wills prevent him, and move him to extend it; but, he doth, out of his own free love, frame our hearts unto the love of him, and work the will in us, which he requires of us, Phil. ii. 12, 13. We repent because he turns us: he doth

not turn to us, because we first turn to him ; his love prevents ours, and doth not stay for it, 1 John iv. 19 ; Isaiah xlviii. 9, 11. The covenant and the grace thereof are immutable, and therefore change not with the unstable will of man. “ God is not man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it, hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good ? ” Numb. xxiii. 19. His covenant of grace is confirmed by an oath, to show the immutability of it. “ This is as the waters of Noah unto me, saith the Lord : for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed ; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy on thee, ” Isaiah liv. 9, 10. A covenant, thus founded upon mere mercy, and sealed by an oath, is more immovable than hills and mountains. The strong foundations of the earth shall be sooner shaken, than the oath of God miscarry. The oath of God is the strongest demonstration of the immutability of his counsel that can possibly be used, Heb. vi. 17 : for where He swears, He doth not repent, Psalm cx. 4. Every work of mercy which He begins, He carries on to a consummation, Phil. i. 6. The foundation of God standeth sure—cannot be infringed, shaken, or undermined by the levity or inconstancy of the will of man, 2 Tim. ii. 19. Whatever the fluctuation of the heart of man may be, “ The counsel of the Lord that shall stand, ” Prov. xix. 21 ; Psalm xxxiii. 10, 11.

The covenant and grace thereof is most powerful and efficacious. Therefore his mercies are sure—his promises yea and amen ! because his word is settled in heaven—

seconded with his power ; which will find means to effect whatever He has spoken. "God hath spoken once," saith the Psalmist, "twice have I heard this." It is a word constant and stable—a word doubled, to note the certainty of it ; as Joseph said unto Pharaoh, Gen. xli. 32. "Power and mercy belong unto God," Psalm lxii. 11, 12. Every promise which mercy makes, power performs. If mercy promise a heart of flesh, and to put His fear into us, God hath power enough to make it good. He may as soon be an impotent, as an unfaithful God. Abraham considered not the impotency of his own body, but the power of God to make good his promise, and therefore "staggered not through unbelief," Rom. iv. 19—21. And so the apostle argues touching the conversion of the Jews :—"If they abide not still in unbelief, they shall be graffed in : for God is ABLE to graff them in," Rom. xi. 23.

The covenant and grace thereof is invincible by many adverse assaults ; nothing can alter, or overrule the will of God, or cause him to recede from his own purposes of showing mercy. If anything could, sin could : but he hath assured us, that *that* shall not. "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments ; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments ; then will I visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes : nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail ; my COVENANT will I not break," &c. Psalm lxxxix. 30—34. Though he punish, it shall be in measure ; not unto rejection, but unto emendation, Isaiah xxvii. 8, 9. As to the guilt of sin, and damnation due unto it, he will pardon it : "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more," Jer. xxxi. 34. As to the dominion thereof, he will subdue it, and

purge it away, Micah vii. 18—20; Psalm lxv. 3. As to the particular prevalency of any lust, he will awaken us to repent—make us by some word, or affliction, or mercy, or example, or providence, to search and consider our ways, and return from all our evil doings. So he did David, by the ministry of Nathan—so Peter by the look of Christ. As to the remainders of it, he will daily mortify, and destroy them, Rom. vi. 6. Sin, then, shall not break out so far as to annul the covenant: for who then could be saved? seeing, “in many things, we offend all,” and, by the grace of the covenant alone, are preserved from offending more. Nay, the Lord is so gracious to his people, that their very sins, which of themselves do only defile and endanger them, are, by God’s goodness, ordered unto their benefit. The Lord could keep his servants from falling, Jude 24; and preserve them blameless, 1 Thess. v. 23; but he is pleased sometimes to leave them, that they may know themselves, and their own weakness; that they may bemoan their own misery, and loathe themselves in their own eyes, Ezek. xx. 43.—That they may be driven to live upon free grace, and pardoning mercy alone, Psalm li. 1.—That they may set a higher price upon the Lord Jesus, who is a sanctuary for the chief of sinners to flee unto, 1 Tim. i. 15.—That they may be the more watchful over their corrupt and deceitful hearts, having so often been betrayed by them.—That they may pray more earnestly for the subduing and mortifying of prevalent corruptions, Rom. vii. 23. In these and other the like ways, the Lord hath to order the very sins of his people unto their good. And if sin shall not prevail against the covenant, we are sure, nothing else shall: He that pardoneth sin, rebuketh Satan, and conquereth the world.—His love is above the reach of anything to separate us from it, Rom. viii. 38—39: none

shall be able to take us out of Christ's or his Father's hands, John x. 28—30.

The covenant and the grace thereof are founded on the blood of Christ, and ratified by it. As He hath by his blood purchased his people, Tit. ii. 14, so hath He by the same procured for them all good things, specified in the covenant, Rom. viii. 32. The blood of Christ can as well be vacated, as any branch of the covenant unfulfilled to believers, for whom they were bought with so precious a price.

His blood is seconded by his intercession. His intercession is the petition of his blood, and therefore shall be undoubtedly granted. "His Father heareth him always," John xi. 41, 42: and he prayeth to his Father, that his people may be so kept, as that they may be with Him, and behold his glory, John xvii. 11, 24. Therefore, accordingly, they shall be kept.

Christ's intercession is seconded by his Father's love to his people:—"I say not that I will pray the Father for you; for the FATHER HIMSELF loveth you," saith Christ, John xvi. 26, 27; and, therefore, must needs be exceeding acceptable, because God's own heart is towards them, and his love upon them.

Lastly—the Lord has promised his Holy Spirit of fear, love, grace, and adoption, unto his people: by the help of which they are preserved from dangers—though not from sorrows.

When the Lord doth strangely vary his providences towards a people, and works unusual and extraordinary changes among them; stirreth up some helps, and then layeth them by; calleth forth others, and then quickly revoketh them; fitteth men for great usefulness, and in the midst of it cutteth them off. Our work is not to censure either the agent or the instruments; to charge

the dealings of God either as unrighteous or as unreasonable ; but to reflect upon ourselves, and learn our own unsteadfastness, by his diversifying of providences towards us.

Now then, since the Lord is righteous in all the ways of his judgments and secret providences, we must for ever lay our hands on our mouths, and beware of murmuring and repining against Him, as if his ways were not equal towards us. "Behold he taketh away, who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, what dost thou?" Job ix. 12. We may, in our prayers, plead with God about his judgments, as holy men have done before, Jer. xii. 1. Hab. i. 2, 4, 13; but we may not quarrel with them, nor murmur against them.

XLIII. God is the refuge of his saints,
When storms of sharp distress invade ;
E'er we can offer our complaints,
Behold him present with his aid.

Let mountains from their seats be hurl'd
Down to the deep, and buried there ;
Convulsions shake the solid world,
Our faith should never yield to fear.

Loud may the troubled ocean roar,
In sacred peace our souls abide ;
While every nation, every shore
Trembles, and dreads the swelling tide.

There is a stream, whose gentle flow
Supplies the city of our God :
Life, love, and joy still gliding thro',
And watering our divine abode.

That sacred stream, thy holy word,
That all our raging fear controls ;

Sweet peace thy promises afford,
And give new strength to fainting souls.

Sion enjoys her Monarch's love,
Secure against a threatening hour ;
Nor can her firm foundation move,
Built on his truth, and arm'd with pow'r.

XLIV. This present world through which we are passing may justly be called a wilderness ; it is a solitary, and a barren way. It is a lonely and a dreary way we are travelling in ; the path is strait and narrow, and few there are that walk therein. This world is no more our friend, than it is our home ; the true christian, therefore, who is born from above, whose conversation is in heaven, and who is daily travelling thitherward, is the object of its malice, or else the subject of its ridicule. The soil of this present evil world is barren and unfruitful ; it presents before our eyes many objects which are an hinderance to us in our way ; but it is entirely desert and barren with respect to any help it affords us in our progress. It produces little else but briers and thorns, which have a tendency only to entangle and wound the feet of those who pass through it. The many afflictions with which the people of God are exercised in the present life, are, as a constant clog to the wheels of their souls, which makes them drag on heavily : and were they not sometimes favored with a view of the rest which remains for them, they would be almost ready to despair of getting safe out of this vale of tears, which they have, therefore, too great occasion to call a waste howling wilderness—a solitary and a barren land.

This present world through which we are passing is also properly compared to a wilderness, as it is likewise a dangerous way. A wilderness is a place not only

barren and unfrequented, but is generally full of pits and wild beasts, which render it exceeding dangerous. For this reason it is styled in scripture "a terrible wilderness, wherein are fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there is no water," Deut. viii. 15. We are called to pass through an enemy's country ; this world is under the influence of our greatest and most inveterate enemy. The Devil is styled the prince of the power of the air and the generality of this world's inhabitants are his willing slaves and vassals. Whilst therefore we are passing through his territories, he will be sure to gain all the advantages he can against us. No sooner do we enlist ourselves under the banner of Christ Jesus, but Satan and the world immediately join in a league against us ; as though they were resolved to rob the Redeemer of his spoil, and pluck those who are the purchase of his blood out of his hands. There is a rooted enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Satan has an inveteracy against every one that bears the image of Jesus ; and "as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour," 1 Peter v. 8. And, like an old serpent, he conceals his wiles, that he may get the better advantage over us. We are, in this life, never free from his temptations : he is always contriving some temptation against us, or presenting it to us. And that we do not oftener fall into the snares which he lays to entrap us, is only owing to the care and vigilance of our Great Leader, and the grace which he is pleased to communicate to us out of his fulness,

As for the world ; "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," how prevalent have these been to draw aside the believer from the God and guide of his youth ! these Philistines are often upon us

before we are aware of them, and there is an unbelieving heart always within, which is as constant fuel to the fire of temptations from without. So that were not God pleased at particular times to open our eyes, and let us see that, "they who are for us are more than they which are against us," we should be ready to give up all in despair.

On these accounts the present state is compared to a wilderness. We wander here in the wilderness, in a solitary way, "we can find no city to dwell in, hungry and thirsty, our souls faint within us." But herein God leads his people by the right way, to the city of habitation. They are dear to him every one as the apple of his eye—as near to him as his right hand. His love was fixed from everlasting upon them, and therefore his care and lovingkindness are ever exercised towards them. He may bring his people into the wilderness, but he cannot, in consistency with the perfections of his nature, or the promise of his grace, ever leave them there. They may, and often do seem to lose their hold of him; but he never does, he never can lose his hold of them. "For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye," Deut. xxxii. 9, 10. There is no getting to Immanuel's land, but by the way of the wilderness; which though it is not our rest itself, yet it leads us to our rest; it fits and prepares us for it; and the afflictions which we meet with therein, serve also to make the heavenly blessedness the more desirable now, and delightful hereafter. God may therefore often lead us in a rough and unpleasant way, but he always leads us in a right way. Let us only take a view of

these particular seasons, wherein we are most apt to question the lovingkindness of our God, and we may determine the happy issue of all the rest.

As,

1. Let us begin with the melancholy state and condition of those from whom God hides the light of his countenance. These are often ready to object against themselves, that they shall never "see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Methinks I hear them complaining with the church of old, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed from my God." And condemning themselves for hypocrites, and mere professors, because of the uncertainty of their frames, and the unfruitfulness of their lives. They are for the present bewildered, as those that have lost their way. They have no sensible communion with Christ—no present discovery of the love of God, to take comfort in: but notwithstanding their fears, "this is the right way, wherein God leads us to the city of habitation." Where the reconciled countenance of a covenant God and father always to be lift up on us, we should be apt to prize the comforts we receive immediately from him more than the glorious person who was the purchaser, and is the bestower of them. Were he never to hide his face, we should live upon the streams, rather than the fountains; we should be too ready to say with the three disciples, "Lord, it is good for us to be here;" we should be ready to make a stop at the banks of Jordan; or at least, we should pass that river with reluctance, indifferent in our desires after what remaineth to be received by us in the heavenly world. In a word, God is pleased to give us at some times, a glimpse of our future glory, that he may excite our desires after the farther enjoyments thereof; and at other times is

pleased wisely to withhold his hand in this respect, that we may be willing, when he calls us, "to depart, and be with Christ." This, then, though it be a way less pleasant for us to walk in, is nevertheless the right way to the place where our hearts and treasure are both lodged; by this means, we are made to long after, and then are led to the city of habitation.

The same may be said,

2. Concerning the various outward afflictions with which the believer is exercised. They are all of them, let them arise from what quarter soever, useful to us, and necessary for us. God never sends an affliction to us but when he sees it needful for us; and he never removes it from us, before it has answered the end for which he at first sent it. Outward afflictions are not accidental things, they come not by chance, but are sent to us by a wise and merciful Father, who causes them to answer the end for which he sends them. By them we are purged from our dross and tin; grace is tried and refined in the furnace of affliction, and they, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, are hereby conformed to his heavenly image—made partakers of his holiness, Heb. xii. 10, and more prepared for his heavenly kingdom. Afflictions are a furtherance to us in our way heaven-ward—not an hindrance to us; though when we are exercised therewith we often conclude ourselves to be in a desert and desolate land. We must be first of all prepared for glory, before we can, in consistency with the perfections of our God, be received into it: and this is the end, and proves the blessed issue of our present afflictions, 2 Cor. iv. 17. Hereby, then, it further appears, that God leads his people the right way, though it may be a rough way, to the city of habitation.

3. The temptations of Satan every one of them an-

swer the same general end. He is, indeed, styled, with an emphasis, "our adversary," 1 Peter v. 8. But he oftentimes proves, contrary to his own design and our expectation, our great friend. The powers of darkness are suffered to dwell amongst us for the same reason that some of the Canaanites were left among the people of Israel; that is, to try us, and show us how weak we are without Christ; and how strong we are when we depend upon that grace which is treasured up in him. By all the advantages they gain against us, they only render us the more distrustful of ourselves; and the grace which we have already received, makes us the more in love with Christ Jesus, our glorious head, in whose strength we overcome them—and more desirous of that city of habitation, which God has prepared for his people; where we shall join the heavenly host, in saying with a loud voice, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night," Rev. xii. 10. Thus we see how God leads his people by the right way, that they may go to a city of habitation.

If then God has prepared for his people a city of habitation; how great is that grace, how free and sovereign is that love, to which this was originally owing! All that we have in time, and all that we expect to enjoy to eternity, proceed alone from this spring; this is the original fountain from which they all flow. The vessels of mercy were prepared from all eternity to glory, though they are prepared ~~now~~ it only in time. And to what can this unspeakable privilege be owing, or into what can it be resolved, short of the sovereign and distinguishing grace of God? This it is alone that makes us differ from others: considered in ourselves, we were

equally the objects of the anger and resentment of an holy God, with those "who are reserved in chains of darkness, to the judgment of the great day;" and had not the free grace of God found out an expedient for our salvation, we must equally with them, have suffered the vengeance of eternal fire. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; That in ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus," Eph. ii. 4—7. Grace acts like itself, it gives all things freely. God deals with us as the "God of all grace;" for he gives us both grace here, and glory hereafter, and "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." He first of all makes us his sons, takes us into the number of his family, and gives us a right and title to the privileges of his house in our justification; and in our sanctification, he gradually prepares us for the more immediate enjoyment of himself in a better world; and then he calls us home to the glorious inheritance itself, "the city of habitation," which he had settled upon us before all worlds. And who of us can take but a slight view of these things, without crying out, with the apostle, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God," 1 John iii. 1. Our eternal predestination to glory, and our actual preparation for it, are both of them owing wholly, and alone, to his free and sovereign grace; and to this shall we everlastingly ascribe it, when we come "to the general assembly, and church of the first-born, and to the spirits of the just made perfect."

Are we to pass through the wilderness to this city of habitation? How much need have we of a guide to show us the way, and how thankful should we be to Him who has undertaken to perform this kind office for us. Were we left in this wilderness-world without a guide, our condition would be deplorable, and our ruin inevitable; we should then fall into the pits and snares which our enemies have made for the entanglement of our feet, and the destruction of our souls; they, that are more mighty than we, would assuredly prevail against us—we should be led captive by Satan at his will—there would be no withstanding his temptations—no escaping his malice and fury, or resisting those whom he employs against us in this desolate and dangerous way. But through grace, this blessing we have. Christ Jesus is styled the “captain of our salvation,” and he faithfully discharges his office, which he has engaged to perform as such. He not only undertook to purchase salvation by his death, but to apply it likewise by his life; he goes before continually as our guide and leader, and marks out the path which we are to take; he communicates to us suitable help and refreshment, while we are in our way; restores our souls when we have gone out of our way, and preserves us from the fury and violence, as well as the craft and subtlety of our many enemies. He is “a pillar of cloud to us for our covering by day, and a pillar of fire for our guidance by night.” He is always at our right hand, so that we shall not be greatly moved. Here lies our safety, and the strong ground of our hope, that we shall not fall short of our rest, or lose the prize we are so earnestly contending for. Christ himself is our life, and the length of our days; who has graciously promised that He will never fail, nor forsake us. May we, there-

fore, begin the work of heaven before we come there, daily offering the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving unto him, even the fruit of our lips. Using the same language here, as we hope to use for ever hereafter. "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his father: to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen." Rev. i. 5, 6.

Is the way of the wilderness the right way to a city of habitation? How easy should this make us under all the temptations, trials, and afflictions with which we are now exercised. "All things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God," 2 Cor. iv. 15. This should make us willingly submit to the various trials we meet with on our passage. There is a crown of glory reserved in heaven for all those that shall continue faithful unto death—a city of habitation, where the weary pilgrim shall rest—rivers of pleasure, where he shall be refreshed and delighted. There he will have an ample amends for all the difficulties he has been exposed to in the present life. The view of this recompence of reward will make death itself pleasant, and hang out a lamp sufficient to enlighten even that dark valley.

Can none get admission into this city of habitation but the "redeemed of the Lord?" Let this lead us to Jesus Christ, the only person "Who is of God, made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," 1 Cor. i. 30. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance unto Israel, and forgiveness of sins," Acts v. 31. No one can save us from our sins, but He whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation for our sin, through faith in his blood. Hither then, must the con-

vinced sinner fly, as his city of refuge ; on His righteousness must we all depend for a right and title to life ; and his Spirit alone can fit and prepare us for it. If we have not on us Christ's perfect righteousness, we are not his people ; none but they who are arrayed with this fine linen, clean and white, shall be thought worthy to enter into this city of habitation. Let us, therefore, be importunate with God to lead us unto Christ, and enable us to believe in him to the saving of the soul. Such he has purchased glory for, and he lives to prepare them for it. "There, as their forerunner, he is for them already entered ; and thither, as the captain of their salvation, will he at last bring them, and present them faultless before the throne of his Father's glory, with exceeding joy."

XLV. Thus far on life's perplexing path,
Thus far, thou, Lord, our steps hast led ;
Snatch'd from the world's pursuing wrath,
Unharm'd tho' floods around us spread,
Like ransom'd Israel on the shore,
Here then we pause, look back, adore !

Strangers and pilgrims here below,
Like all our fathers in their day,
We to the land of promise go,
Lord, by thine own appointed way :
Still guide, illumine, cheer our flight
In cloud by day, in fire by night.

Safety thy presence is, and rest ;
While—(as the eagle, o'er her brood,
Flutters her pinions, stirs the nest,
Covers, defends, provides them food,
Bears on her wings, instructs to fly),—
Thy love prepares us for the sky.

Protect us thro' this WILDERNESS,
From fiery serpent, plague, and foe ;

With bread from heav'n thy people bless,
And living streams where'er we go ;
Nor let our rebel hearts repine,
Or follow any voice but thine.

Thy holy law to us proclaim,
But not from Sinai's top alone ;
Hid in the rock-cleft, be thy name,
Thy pow'r and all thy goodness shown,
And may we never bow the knee,
Or worship any God but thee.

When we have number'd all our years,
And stand, at length, on Jordan's brink,
Tho' the flesh fail with mortal fears,
O ! let not then the spirit sink ;
But strong in faith, and hope, and love,
Plunge thro' the stream, to rise above !

XLVI. Our heavenly Father graciously severe, and wisely kind, often takes care to infuse some salutary bitter into his children's cup below ; since, were they, here, to taste of happiness, absolute and unmixed ; were not the gales of prosperity, whether spiritual, or temporal, counterpoised, more or less, by the needful ballast of affliction ; his people (always imperfect here) would be enriched to their loss, and liable to be overset, in their way to the kingdom of God. Wherefore, consummate happiness, without any mixture of wormwood, is reserved for our enjoyment in a state, where perfect sanctification will qualify us to possess it. In heaven, and there only, " the inhabitant shall no more say," in any sense whatever, " I am sick."

Let every afflicted believer then, rejoice in that he is made low. God deals out our comforts and our sorrows, with exact, unerring hand, in number, weight and mea-

sure. Hence we have not, either of joy or adversity, a grain too little, or too much. If less tribulation would suffice, less would be given. We are bad enough, with all our troubles; what then should we be, if we were exercised with none? Is affliction then the christian's lot? It is a visit from heaven. "Thou hast visited, thou hast tried me," says David, Psalm xvii. 3. God never uses the flail, but when his corn wants threshing:

Our hearts are fastened to the world
By strong and various ties :
But every sorrow cuts a string,
And urges us to rise.

Afflictions are as nails, driven by the hand of grace, which crucify us to the world. The husbandman ploughs his land, and the gardener prunes his trees, to make them fruitful. The jeweller cuts and polishes his diamonds to make them shine the brighter. The refiner flings his gold into the furnace that it may come out the purer. And God afflicts his people to make them better. To thank God for mercies is the way to increase them; to thank him for miseries is the way to remove them.—Afflictions are then blessings to us, when we can bless God for afflictions; whose only purpose, in causing us to pass through the fire, is to separate the sin he hates, from the soul he loves. And, in all his dealings with us, let us remember, that, though he cause grief, yet he will have compassion: at the worst times, he will suit his dispensations to our strength, or afford strength for his dispensations.

XLVII. Sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotions. There is no affliction so small, but we should sink

under it, if God upheld us not ; and there is no sin so great, but we should commit it, if God restrained us not.

“The time is short,” 1 Cor. vii. 29, and, if your cross is heavy, you have not far to carry it.

As no temporal blessing is good enough to be a sign of eternal election ; so no temporal affliction is severe enough to be an evidence of reprobation ; for the dearest Son of God’s love, was a “ man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”

Every vessel of mercy must be scoured, in order to brightness. And, however trees in the wilderness grow without culture, trees in the garden must be pruned, to be made fruitful ; and corn-fields must be broken up, when barren heaths are left untouched.

God may cast his people down, but he will not cast them off.

Through Christ’s satisfaction for sin, the very nature of affliction is changed with regard to believers. As death, which was first the wages of sin, is now become a bed of rest (they shall rest upon their beds, saith the prophet), Isaiah lvii. 2. So afflictions are not the rod of God’s anger, but the corrections of a tender Father.

If we gain the kingdom at last, it is no great matter what we suffer by the way.

Afflictions are as needful for our souls as food is for our bodies.

It is a good sign of our state, when the Lord blows off the blossom of our forward hopes in this life, and lops the branches of our worldly joys to the very root, on purpose that they should not thrive. He spoils the enjoyment of this life, that we may be saved for ever.

XLVIII. The Lord knows how to deliver his people,

and He can if he will ; and will do it in their greatest extremities, when it is most for his glory—his people's comfort, and the confusion of his own, and their enemies. Never let them, then, despair of themselves or of the church of God. Paul salutes the Philippians from the church in Cæsar's house, Phil. iv. 22, a place (in appearance) little fitter for a church, than hell itself ; what, though things seem to them past recovery, when they are at the worst, then are they nearest mending. When the task of brick was doubled by Pharaoh upon Israel, then came Moses to work out their deliverance, Exodus v. 11. When the Jews heard news of their liberty to return from captivity, they "were as those that dreamed," Psalm cxxvi. 1 ; they could not suddenly believe it, it seemed so strange a thing in that their hopeless state.

Let us learn then, from this dealing of God with his people, in the midst of all extremities, to plead with God the extremity we are in ; "Help, Lord, for vain is the help of man," is a prevailing argument. Plead the malice of enemies—the presumption of those that fear not God—and that he only can give issue from death when he will. Let us hope against hope—in misery, look for mercy—in death, for life—in guilt, for forgiveness ; learn to wrestle with God, when he seemeth thy enemy ; oppose to God his former dealings, his nature and his promises. Be of Jacob's resolution, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." Whatever we are stripped of, let us not forsake our own mercies. This one word, "I despair," takes away God and Christ at once. We must remember, our sins are the sins of men, but his mercy is the mercy of God ; who will never leave us, but be with us, while we are with him. The people of the world leave a man when they can have no more use of him. Satan leaves his sworn vassals at their wits

end, when he hath brought them to the extremity of danger. But blessed be for ever our gracious God, then of all other times he is nearest to help us, when we stand most in need of him. He was never nearer to Jacob, than when heaven was his canopy, and a stone his pillow —never nearer Paul, than when in the dungeon, Acts xvi. 25. A christian is not alone, when left alone, nor forsaken, when forsaken ; God and his angels can supply the want of all other comforts. Is it not the greatest comfort to a christian when God, passing by means, comes immediately himself unto him, and comforts him by his Spirit ; for in defect of second causes, comforts are ever sweetest ; therefore, in all extremities, let us wait and hope still for mercy, “If the vision stay, wait, for it will come,” Hab. ii. 3.

Here is the chief difference between the child of God, and one destitute of grace. For the child of God in extremity recovers himself ; while the unconverted in any extremity sinks down with despair. The christian can rest on God’s mercy in Christ, when other props are taken away.

But for spiritual extremities, oftentimes the strongest feel them with the quickest sense ; for God herein respects not always sins past ; neither more nor less measure of grace, as in Job’s case, who could, without much distemper of soul, endure extremities both of body and state ; but when God wrote bitter things against him, presently, he begins to sink, but begins only, for when he was at the worst, he stays himself upon his Redeemer, Job xix. 25, to the glory of God’s grace. Thus, sometimes God makes his children triumph whom he sets as champions in defiance of Satan. They in weakness think they shall utterly fail and perish, but their standing out in the greatest conflicts, shows to the contrary. The

author of their safety is the Lord ; no less than an almighty power is necessary to deliver them. For such is our inclinableness to join with temptation—such the malice and strength of our enemy,—so many are the fears, and so cunningly spread in everything are the snares we deal withal, that whatsoever delivereth us, must be above Satan and our own evil hearts—more wise—more powerful—more gracious to preserve us, than any adverse power can be to draw us to evil works. In which case, well said Moses, when God in his wonted glorious presence refused to go along with them, “If thou go not with us, carry us not hence,” Exod. xxxiii. 15. Beloved, our lives are such as stand in need of perpetual deliverance. Our state here is wavering. The church lives always in tents, and hath never hope of any rest until the day of triumph ; therefore, after “forgiveness of sins,” we are taught by infinite wisdom to pray, “lead us not into temptation;” because though sins past be forgiven, yet we are in danger to be led into temptation : let no one promise a truce to himself, which God promises not ; if Satan and our corruptions join, we cannot be quiet ; after sins of youth, we are in danger of sins of riper age ; for though by grace, sin in some sort be subdued, yet, until it be wholly mortified, there will be some stirring up, until that which is imperfect in us be abolished.

It is the duty, as well as the privilege of the christian, also to reason with God from former experience to future ; yea, it is a binding argument with God. He loves to be sued (Ezek. xxxvi. 37) and pressed from former mercies, and suffers them to be bonds unto him. Men act otherwise, because their fountain is soon drawn dry. But God is a spring that can never be exhausted. As he was able to help in former time,

so is he also for the time to come. He is always, "I AM, Jehovah"—always where he was, his arm is not shortened; what he hath done heretofore, he can do now. We should, therefore, register God's favors (which is the best use we can put our memories to), and make them so many arguments to build upon him for time to come, as David said, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, will deliver me out of the hand of the Philistine." O, were we but acquainted with this kind of reasoning with God, how undaunted should we be in all troubles! We should be as secure for the time to come, as for the time past, for all is one with God: we do exceedingly wrong our own souls, and weaken our faith, by not taking notice of God's favors. How strong in faith might old men be, that have had many experiences of God's love, if they would take this course! Every former mercy should strengthen our faith for a new one; as conquerors, whom every former victory encourages to a new conquest. So former favors should animate us to apply to God afresh: let us ask him to keep us from occasions of sin, or to minister strength if occasions be offered—to give us opportunities of doing good, and to give us a heart to avail ourselves of those opportunities. It is he that preserves us from evil works, by planting the graces of faith and of fear within us, whereby we are preserved; and by peace which keeps our souls from despair, and rebellious thoughts; yea, he preserves us from evil works, through faith, unto his heavenly kingdom. In a word, God preserves his children by making them better—by weakening their corruptions by his Spirit, and stirring up in them a clear sight and hatred of sin—by chaining up Satan, our great enemy, until he have given us strength to encounter him.

What a mercy it is, though little thought of, that God letteth not loose Satan upon us every moment ; how should this stir us up to thankfulness and entire dependence upon God ! This is a marvellous point of comfort, that the Israel of God may say, The gates of hell may set themselves against the church, but shall not prevail, Psalm cxxix. 1, 2. We neither live nor die at man's appointment : our lives are not in our own hands, or Satan's, or our enemies', but in God's ; they shall do no more, they shall do no less than God pleases, who is our life, and the length of our days. God may give way for awhile that the thoughts of many may be revealed, and that his glory may shine the more in preserving his children, and confounding his enemies. But he will put an end in his own time, and that is the best time. There is a day of "Jacob's trouble," when his enemies say, "This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after," Jer. xxx. 7, 17. But God sets bounds both to the time of his children's trouble, and to the malice of the wicked. Their rod shall not rest OVERLONG upon the back of the righteous, Psalm cxxv. 3. God will put a hook into the nostrils of these leviathans, and draw them which way he pleaseth. God delivers also the ungodly from dangers, not out of any love to their persons, but because he hath some base service for them to undertake, to exercise the patience of his children, and vex others that are better than themselves, which is not fit for godly men to do ; they are only God's rod, and their deliverance is no preservation, but a reservation to worse mischief. But God delivers his own—graciously, not only from danger, but from the sin they are subject to fall into to their great danger, Heb. xii. 1. It is not ill to suffer ill, but to do ill ; for doing ill makes God our enemy, suffering ill doth not ; doing ill stains and defiles

the soul, and blemishes the image of God in us, suffering ill doth none of this ; doing ill hinders communion with God, suffering ill doth not, for God is more immediately acquainted with the soul in suffering ill.

Let this teach us thus much, that in all the changes and alterations which the faith of man is subject to, he is sure of one thing, all the troubles and all the enemies in the world shall not hinder his salvation. If it be possible the elect should be deceived, Matt. xxiv. 24 ; but it is not possible. O what a comfort is this, that in the midst of all the oppositions and plottings of men and devils, we have something that is not in the power of any enemy to take from us—not in our own power to lose, namely—our salvation ! Set this against any evil whatsoever, and it swallows up all. Set this, I shall be saved, against any misery you can imagine, and it will unspeakably comfort and revive the soul.

XLIX. This life is like a troublesome dream ; but blessed are they, who, when once the dream is out, and when once they come to awake, shall be satisfied with realities of true peace and comfort in the fountain of freedom and goodness. We find our comfort and expectation here little better than a bed of thorns, because this is not the rest that is designed for the people of God ; and it will be some help to us under this disquieting exercise and condition, to remember, that while we are passing through, we are held in the hand of Him who has a fellow-feeling of our case—who did once pass through the difficulties, and drank of the brook in the way, but now lifts up his head, and so is become the foundation of our hope—that such poor wretches as we are, shall one day through faith and patience, arrive where our Forerunner is entered. Only now let us cling

to Him, till we become transformed into his likeness, and be completely dressed with the white robe of his righteousness : that in Him, and only in Him, we may be found without spot. In the mean space, let us pray and abound therein, for ourselves and one another—to our gracious God, who will at length perfect that which concerneth us.

L. How vain is all beneath the skies,
How transient every earthly bliss !
How slender all the fondest ties,
That bind us to a world like this.

The evening cloud, the morning dew,
The with'ring grass, the fading flower,
Of earthly hopes are emblems true,
The glory of a passing hour !

But tho' earth's fairest blossoms die,
And all beneath the skies is vain,
There is a land whose confines lie
Beyond the reach of care and pain.

Then let the hope of joys to come
Dispel our cares and chase our fears ;
If God be ours, we're trav'lling home,
Tho' passing thro' a vale of tears.

LI. Sometimes afflictions are spurs and incentives, and sometimes they are burdens and discouragements to obedience : but when we arrive at heaven, we shall no longer need the spur to quicken us ; nor shall we bear any burden to oppress us ; but shall cast it down at heaven's gate, where never sorrow or suffering yet entered. In heaven we shall rest from our labour in working under desertion. Now we apprehend God frowning

on us, and finding fault with all we do. Now, it may be, though God doth cause the clear light of his precepts and Spirit to shine before us ; yet he makes it dismal darkness behind us, and shuts up the light of his comfort from us ; and this is our great trouble. Obedience were easy and pleasant, says the soul, did but the light of God's countenance shine upon us ; but, alas ! I pray, and he shuts out my prayer from him ; I lay hold upon him, but he shakes me off in displeasure ; I endeavour to obey, but he rejects all my services, and this is the great anguish and torment of my life. This, indeed, is matter of great grief and trouble. But, know, O soul, thou shalt not long work thus in the dark : shortly thou shalt be above these clouds, and then thou shalt see, that those prayers which thou thoughtest were vainly scattered and lost in the air, are become a cloud of sweet incense hovering before the throne of God,—and that those tears which thou thoughtest were dropped in vain on the earth, are all gathered up and preserved in God's bottle,—and that those poor duties of thine, which, for their meanness and vileness, thou thoughtest God would scorn, yet, through that worth that is put upon them by the intercession of Christ, are ranked in the same degree of acceptance as the most perfect services of the angels themselves. Have but patience awhile, continue working, Psalm xxxvii. 3, 4, 5, and thou shalt surely see a happy issue ; when the clouds of darkness and desertion that now lie so heavy on thy spirit, shall be scattered and blown away. You shall rest from your labour in working against the continual workings of your own corruptions, which shall then at once cease to act, and cease to be. And this is the great thing that makes it such a blessed rest for the people of God. Indeed, God cuts you out your work in his commands ; but it is the old

man that makes it to be tedious—irksome, and difficult to you, by deadening your heart to it, and by turning your heart against it. Now both these shall shortly cease and be removed, if you but patiently wait and continue striving against them.

1. You shall rest from all that labour that you take with a deceitful, dead, and heavy heart, in the ways of God. Now, you are continually calling upon it, Awake, awake! Now, you are continually urging it to get forward; lifting it up, to get a little higher towards God and heaven. Now, you stand in need of continual quickening, and grace to actuate and excite you; and it is the great misery of your lives that you find your hearts so heartless and listless to what is holy and spiritual. Have but patience for a short time; continue still to struggle against this sad indisposition, and it shall not be long before you shall rest from this labour also. Soon shall your affections be always intent, and not languish; always burning, and yet shall never waste or consume. Every motion of your soul shall then shoot itself up to God as quick as the lightning, and yet as constant as the sunbeams. And those who are now outstripped by weak christians, shall then be able to keep pace in their obedience, even with the holy angels themselves.

And then,

2. In heaven there shall be a resting from all that labour that the people of God take in the ways of holy obedience, through the averseness of their hearts against them.

There is that contradiction in the carnal part against what is holy and spiritual, that the godly cannot bring themselves to the performance of it without much conflict; “the flesh lusteth against the spirit;” and, when the spiritual part calleth for holy thoughts and heavenly

affections, the corrupt and fleshly part sends forth noisome and foul vapours, obstructing the good we do, and infecting that little good that we do perform, Rom. vii. —So that, as if working were not a sufficient employment, a christian must fight that he may work : and this it is, that makes “working out our own salvation” so laborious, because we must fight and work at the same time. But it shall not be long before that which hinders shall be removed ; and, then, as you are no longer under a sad necessity of offending God, so also you shall be under a most blessed necessity of serving God ; and shall find no more trouble in that service, than in those actions which you now cannot but do. And thus shall you have a happy rest from all that labour and pains that your corruptions here made you take. And therefore, be encouraged to perseverance in well-doing ; perfect the work you have undertaken, in spite of all opposition from your own corrupt hearts ; for, assure yourselves, this troublesome inmate shall not long disquiet you. You shall rest too from your labour, in working against Satan’s temptations ; who is now buffetting you while here on earth ; but, in heaven, the evil one shall not approach near to touch you. You shall then stand no more on your guard, and keep watch over your own soul ; but shall for ever triumph in victories and conquests over them.

This is that blessed rest that you shall shortly possess, if only now you wait in patience. And what is it that comforts the wearied traveller, but this, every step of his long way brings him nearer to his home, when he shall enjoy a longer rest ? And shall not the same encourage you in your way ? It will not be long ere you lie down in the bed of the grave—sweetly wait the short period that is between this and the resurrection : your tried and weary souls shall then repose in the bosom of God

himself ; and then you shall enjoy an eternity of rest and peace.

LII. God causes us to walk in many rough paths, as to our outward condition ; yet, he still appears a “ God of all grace,” and does in these things plainly tell us, that this world is not our rest ; and therefore we meet with thorns and briars here, that we may have the fresher desires maintained in our hearts, aspiring upwards. The greatest of earthly contentments will be of no worth nor use in heaven : neither can they of themselves, any way add to the comfort or thriving of a spiritual life here on earth. The only life we are allowed to live in this world is the life of faith, which grows better under difficulties, than in a smooth state of ease. There is no sweeter entertainment that God can give to his poor children on earth, than to convince them that the best of this world’s portion is too lean diet for them to feed upon ; and so make them take the truer taste of that marrow and fatness, which in Christ they are always to live upon ; that is, no less than God himself, the fountain of blessedness, safety, peace, sufficiency, and solid joy. What can come amiss to that soul which Christ undertakes by all things and through all things to bring to himself ? For this end he died ; and this is the great end of every trial we meet with ; and upon this ground, the Spirit saith, “ Count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations.” All the glory, fulness and ease of this world, are but horror and distress to a convinced soul, that looks upon God as an enemy, Prov. xi. 4 ; but nothing can be dismally sad, when God saith, “ I am thine.” When Infinite saith, “ I am thine.” Thy trials shall not quite overwhelm thee—thy sins shall not ruin thee—death itself shall not destroy thee. “ O death, where is thy destruction ;” when God

shall say, "I will be with thee in the fire, and in the water." Thy person is accepted, thy prayers (though in thine own eyes without any form or comeliness) are sweet, and accepted in Christ, who hath chosen thee, and therefore thou hast chosen him. What shall I say? The freeness of God's grace in Christ; his powerful and most voluntary love is such, wherever it darts, that neither sin nor Satan can stand before it, to hinder a jot of that good which such a God has promised, and undertook to perform; and that, merely upon the account of His own Name, streaming forth through Christ in the gospel, to such poor impenitent creatures as we are. O commit ourselves to this God, whose we are, and whom we serve. He will guide us by his Spirit, till he has brought us to glory.

LIII. God has many wise reasons why he doth not immediately give audience to his people, or a gracious answer at their first call.

1. He will try our faith, to see if we can depend upon Him alone, when it cometh to an extremity. Thus by silence and rebukes, Christ tried the woman of Canaan, that her faith might appear the more gloriously. "Then Jesus answered, and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith," Matt. xv. 28. And by extremities he still trieth his children. Our graces are never exercised to the life, till we are near the point of death. That is faith that can then depend upon God:—"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." It is strong faith alone, that can hold out in straits and difficulties.

2. To awaken our importunity. "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always

to pray, and not to faint," Luke xviii. 1. So the blind men, Matt. xx. 31: the more they were rebuked, cried the more. Rather than his people shall neglect prayer, or grow formal in it, God will cast them into great afflictions; as Christ suffered the storm to continue, till the ship was almost overwhelmed, that his disciples might awaken him, Matt. viii. 25.

3. To make us sensible of our utter weakness, as Paul. "But we have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raiseth the dead," 2 Cor. i. 9. We are much given to self-dependance, therefore God will prove it, and, ere he hath done with us, make us trust in him alone. There is a twofold strength—natural and spiritual.

Natural, which arises from that courage that is in man, as he is a reasonable creature. This will hold out, till all probabilities be spent. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear?" Prov. xviii. 14. Till a man be struck at the heart, his reason will support him.

Spiritual, arising from faith, hope, patience. These may be exhausted, when the affliction is deep and of long duration, and God's help is long delayed. Faith is the strength of the soul; as faith decays or is tired out, the soul faints and cries out, "I am cut off from before thine eyes." It throws up all, and thinks it is in vain to wait any longer. Thus does God discover our weakness to ourselves—the weakness of our reason—the weakness of our faith. Solomon says, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small," Prov. xxiv. 10. Grievous or long afflictions discover our strength or weakness. Some are of a poor spirit, and give up at the first assault; before the probabilities which sense or reason offer are spent. Some are negligent, and

do not make use of the helps of faith, but when evils continue long, and press hard, their faith is seen to be too weak ; God by this will humble us.

4. God does this for his own glory, and that his work may be the more remarkable. Christ may dearly love his own, as he did Lazarus, and yet delay to help till the extremity, or the fit time be come, wherein the mercy may be the more conspicuous. It is said, "God hath made every thing beautiful in his time," Eccles. iii. 11. Before its time, God's work seems harsh and rough ; as a statue when it is first hewn out of the block ; but God in his own time and way, knows best how to comfort his people. It is also the design of Satan to weary out God's people, and therefore he stirs up all his malice against them. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not," Luke xxii. 31, 32. The Devil, if he had liberty to do his worst, would drive us from the faith of Christ, and all hopes in him. Wicked men will not relent or abate anything of their persecution of God's people. "I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction," Zech. i. 15. They are still adding to the church's trouble, and would destroy those whom God only designs to purge and correct : till God restrain, their wrath never ceaseth.

Let it not seem strange to us, that godly men in their afflictions, though they fly to God, and implore his mercy, are not presently delivered. God hath much work to do, and many discoveries to make. Would you have faith rewarded before it is tried ? Would you have the links in the beautiful chain of causes disturbed for your sakes ? Faith is not tried to any purpose, until the thing we believe be out of sight ;

and we have no probability that ever we shall see it; yea, till we see nothing but the contrary, and hope against hope. We must stay till the mercy be ready for us, and we ready for it. Our times are, we think, always present with us, when God's time is not yet come. Let us prepare for, and be ready to meet grievous and tedious sufferings. We would put aside our hard lesson, before we have learned it by heart. We all love ease, and would have no cross, or a very short one. Things will not be so soon or so quickly effected as we imagine. We must pray to be "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness," Col. i. 11.

If your affliction be long, observe your carriage under it. See that faith and hope keep you alive still, "Be not slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises," Heb. vi. 12. Do you keep up prayerful affections? Do you continue instant in prayer? Rom. xii. 12. We pray as men out of heart, for form's sake, and with little life, rather satisfying our consciences, than expressing our hope and confidence in God. A damp on the spirit of prayer is an evil presage. Can you love God though you be not feasted with self-comforts and present benefits? "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee," Isaiah xxvi. 8. God will have us love him for himself alone.

LIV. I ask'd the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace—
Might more of his salvation know,
And seek more earnestly his face.

'Twas He who taught me thus to pray;
And He, I trust, has answer'd pray'r;

But it has been in such a way,
As almost drove me to despair.

I hop'd, that in some favor'd hour,
At once he'd answer my request ;
And, by his love's constraining pow'r,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, He made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart ;
And let the angry pow'rs of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea, more, with his own hand He seem'd
Intent to aggravate my woe ;
Cross'd all the fair designs I schem'd,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

Lord, why is this ? I trembling cried,
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death ?
" 'Tis in this way," the Lord reply'd,
" I answer pray'r for grace and faith :

These bitter trials I employ
From self and pride to set thee free ;
And mar thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou may'st seek thy all in me."

LV. To trust God when our warehouses and bags are full, and our table spread, is no very hard thing : but to trust him, when our purses are empty, when there is only a handful of meal and a cruse of oil left, and all ways of relief stopped, herein lies the test of a christian's grace. Yet none are exempted from this duty ; all are bound to acknowledge their trust in him by the daily prayer for daily bread ; even those who have it in their cupboards, as well as those that want it ; the greatest prince, as well as the meanest beggar. Whatever your

wants are, want not faith, and you cannot want supplies. It is the want of this binds up God's hand from doing great works for his creatures, Mark vi. 5, 6. The more we trust him, the more he concerns himself in our affairs. The more we trust ourselves, the more he delights to cross us; for he hath denounced such an one cursed, that maketh flesh his arm, Jer. xvii. 5; because it is a departing from the Lord. No wonder then that God departs from us, and carries away his blessing with him: while we trust ourselves, we do but trouble ourselves, and know not how to reconcile our various reasons for hopes and fears; but the committing our way to the Lord renders our minds calm and composed. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established," Prov. xvi. 3. Thou shalt have no more of those disquieting anxious thoughts, what the success shall be.

1. Trust Providence in the greatest extremities—he brings us into straits, that he may see the exercise of our faith. "I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord," Zeph. iii. 12. When we are most desolate we have most need of this exercise, and have the fittest season to practise it. He is always our refuge and strength, but in time of trouble a present help, Psalm xlvi. 1. Daniel's new advancement by Belshazzar but a day before the city was taken by the enemy, the king slain—and no doubt many of his nobility, and those that were nearest in authority with him, was a danger; yet God, by ways not expressed, preserved Daniel, and gave him favor with the conqueror. God often leads his own people into great dangers, that they may see and acknowledge his hand in their preservation. God's eye is always upon them that fear him, Psalm xxxiii. 18; not

to keep distress from them, but to quicken them in it, and give them, as it were, a new life from the dead—to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine, ver. 19. God brings us into straits that we may have a more lively experience of his tenderness in his seasonable relief: if he be angry, “he will repent himself for his servants, when he sees their power is gone,” Deut. xxxii. 36; because then the glory of his providence is appropriated to himself. “See now, that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me; I kill, and I make alive,” ver. 39. No creature can have any pretence to share in it; He delights thereby to draw up our affections to himself, and admiration of him, and to store up in us a treasure of experience, to encourage our trusting in him in the like straits. We should, therefore, repose ourselves on God in a desert, as well as in cities; with as much faith among savage beasts as in the best company of the most sociable men:—and answer the greatest strait with Abraham’s speech to Isaac, “God will provide.” For we have to do with a God who is bound up to no means, who delights to perfect his strength in the creature’s weakness. We have to do with a God, who only knows what may further our good, and accordingly orders it, who only knows what may hinder it, and therefore prevents it. He can set all causes in such a posture, as shall work together as one link to bring about success, and make even contrary motions meet in one gracious end; as the rivers which run from north and south, the contrary quarters of the world, meet in the surges in one sea. Though providences may seem to cross one another, they shall never cross God’s word and promise, which he hath magnified above all his names. And his providence is but a servant of his truth.

2 Trust in the way of means. Though we are sure God hath decreed the certain event of such a thing, yet we must not encourage our idleness, but our diligence. Though Moses was assured of the victory, when Amalek came armed against him, yet he commands Joshua to draw up the valiant men in a body, himself goes to the mount to pray, and is as diligent in the use of all means, as if he had been ignorant of God's purpose, and had rather suspected the rout of his own, than his enemies forces. Neither doth Joshua afterwards, though secured by promise in his conquest of Canaan, omit any part of the duty of a wise and watchful general ; he sends spies, disciplines his forces, besiegeth cities, and contrives stratagems. Providence directs us by means ; not to use them is to tempt our guardian : where it intends any great thing for our good, it opens a door and puts such circumstances into our hands, as we may use without the breach of any command, or the neglect of our own duty. God could have secured Christ from Herod's fury by a miraculous stroke from heaven upon his enemy, but he orders Joseph and Mary's flight into Egypt as a means of his preservation. God rebukes Moses for praying and not using the means in continuing the people's march. "Wherefore criest thou unto me ? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward," Exod. xiv. 15. To use means without respect to God, is proudly to contemn him ; to depend upon God without the use of means, is irreligiously to tempt him ; in both we abuse providence. In the one we disobey him in not using the means he hath appointed ; in the other presumptuously impose upon him for the encouragement of our laziness. Diligence on our part, and the blessing on God's, Solomon joins together ; "The hand of the diligent maketh rich," Prov. x. 4 ; but,

"the blessing of the Lord it maketh rich," ver. 22." So, our works "are in the hand of God," Eccles. ix. 1 : our works, but God's blessing ; God's blessing, but not without our works. Our labour should be rather more vigorous than more faint, when we are assured of the blessing of Providence by the infallibility of the promise.

3. Trust Providence by way of precept. Let not any reliance upon an ordinary providence induce you into any way contrary to the command. Daniel had many inducements from an appearance of providence to eat the king's meat—his necessity of compliance in his captivity—probability of preferment by learning the wisdom of the country, whereby he might both have advanced himself, and assisted his countrymen—the greatness of the consideration for a captive to be fed from the king's table—the ingratitude he might be accused of, for despising so kind a treatment ; but none of these things moved him against a command : because the law of God forbad it, he would not eat of the king's meat. Daniel might have argued—I may ingratiate myself with the king—do the church of God a great service by my interest with him, which may be dashed in pieces by my refusal of this kindness ; but none of these things moved him. No providences wherein we have seeming circumstances of glorifying God, must lead us out of the way of duty ; this is to rob God one way to pay him another. God brought Daniel's ends about ; he finds favor with the governor, his request is granted, the success is answerable ; and all those ends attained, which he might in a sinful way, by an ill construction of providence, have proposed to himself ; all which he might have missed of, had he run on in a carnal manner. This, this is the way to success. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass,"

Psalm xxxvii. 5. Commit thy way to the guidance of his providence with an obedience to his precept, and refer all success in it to God. If we set up our golden calf made of our own earrings—our wit—our strength—our carnal prudence, because God seems to neglect us, our doom may be the same as theirs; and the very dust of our demolished calf may be a bitter spice in our drink, as it was in their's.

4. Trust him solely, without prescribing any methods to him. Leave him to his wise choice, wait upon him because he is a God of judgment, Isaiah xxx. 18, who goes judiciously to work, and can best time the executions of his will. The wise God observes particular periods of time, for doing his great works. “Woman what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come,” John ii. 4—which man is no competent judge of. I will do this miracle, but the hour is not yet come wherein it will be most beautiful. God hath as much wisdom in fixing the time of the performance of his promise, as he had mercy at first to make it. How presumptuous would it not be for a shallow world, a thing worse than nothing and vanity, to prescribe rules to the Creator; much more for a single person, a little atom of dust, infinitely worse than nothing, and vanity, to do it! Since we had no hand in creating the world or ourselves, let us not presume to direct God in the government of it. “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding,” Job xxxviii. 4. Would it not be a disparagement to God to stoop to thy foolish desires? Yea, would you not yourselves have a lower conceit of him, if he should degrade his wisdom, to the wrong bias of your blind reason?

5. Submit to Providence. It is God's right to govern

the world, and dispose of his own creatures ; it is his glory in heaven to do what he will, Psalm cxv. 3. Let us not by our unsubmissive carriage, deprive him of the same glory on earth ; he brings to pass his will by ways the creature cannot understand. We must walk by the rule of reason which God hath given us for our guide ; yet if Providence bring to pass any event contrary to our rational expectations, because it is a clear evidence of his will, we must acquiesce. As when a traveller hath two ways to come to his journey's end, the one safe, the other dangerous, reason persuades him to choose the safe way, wherein he falls among thieves ; now having used his reason, which in that case was to be his director, he must acquiesce : God's providence bringeth forth an event, which he could not without violence to his reason avoid. And therefore, it is great folly when a man hath resolved the most probable way in a business, and fails in it, to torment himself, because though our consultations depend upon ourselves, yet the issues of them are solely in the hand of God, Prov. xvi. 9. It concerns us therefore, to submit to God's disposal of us and our affairs, since nothing can come to pass but by the will of God effecting it, or permitting it. If the fall of a sparrow is not without his will, Matt. x. 29, much less can the greater events which befall men, the nobler creatures, be without the same concurrence of God's pleasure.

Therefore, submit—for

1. Whatsoever God doth, he doth wisely ; his acts are not sudden or rash, but acts of counsel—not taken up upon the present posture of things, but the resolves of eternity. As he is the highest wisdom, so all his acts are imbued with it, and he guides his will by counsel. “Who worketh all things after the counsel of his own

will," Eph. i. 11. If God took counsel in creating the world, much more in laying the foundation of government—much more in the act of government: for men can frame models of government, that can never reduce them into practice. Now, God being infinitely wise, and his will infinitely good, it must needs be, that goodness and wisdom are the rules whereby he directs himself in his actions in the world. And what greater motive can there be to persuade us to submission, than wisdom and goodness transacting all things? God's counsel being the firmest, as well as the wisest, it is folly both ways to resist it.

2. God discovers his mind to us by Providence. Every work of God being the result of his counsel, when we see it actually brought forth into the world, what else does it discover to us but that counsel and will of his? Every single providence hath a language wherein God's mind is signified, much more a train and contexture of them—"Tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached," Luke vii. 22. Our Saviour informs John's disciples from acts of providence; he gives them no other answer, but turns them over to interpret and construe his works in the case. Providence, therefore, must not be resisted when God's mind in it is discovered; it is disingenuous to act against his pleasure and manifest mind;—it is the Devil's sin. Aaron, when he lost his two sons in so judicial a manner, by fire from heaven, yet held his peace, Lev. x. 1—3; because God had declared his mind positively—"I will be glorified." It is dangerous to resist the mind of God; for the word of his providence shall prosper, in spite of men and devils. "My word that goeth forth of my mouth,

shall not return unto me void ; it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it," Isaiah lv. 11 ; and, therefore, a resisting of it, is termed a fighting against God, by Gamaliel—no great friend to the church, Acts v. 38, 39.

3. Murmur not at Providence. Though we do not clearly resist it, if there be a repining submission, it is a partial opposition to the will of God. We might as well murmur at God's creation, as at his providence, for the one is as arbitrary as the other. He is under no law but his righteous will : we should leave therefore the government of the world to God's wisdom, as we acknowledge the frame of it to be an act of his power. Let God govern the world according to his own wisdom and will—till all mankind can agree in one method to offer to him ; and that I think will never be, though the world should last for ever. Murmur not then : whatever is done in the world is the work of a wise agent, who acts for the perfection of the whole universe ; and why should I murmur at that which promotes the common happiness and perfection, that being better and more desirable than the perfection of any one particular person ? Must a musician break all his strings because one is out of tune ? And must God change his course because things are out of order with one man, though in regard of Divine Providence things are not out of order in themselves, for God is a God of order ? This temper will hinder our prayers. With what face can we pray to that God whose wisdom we repine at ? If God do exercise a providence in the world, why do we murmur ? If he do not take care, why do we pray to him ? It is a contradiction. It also hinders us from giving God the glory—and ourselves the comfortable sight of his providence. God may have taken something from us, which is the matter of our sorrow, and given another thing to

us which might be the matter of our joy. What advantage can it be to murmur? Can all your cries stop the motion of the heavens? Can your clamours make the clouds move faster? Can they persuade the showers from drenching us? Murmuring at any afflictive providence is the sure way to make the rod smarter in itself, and sharper to us.

4. Study Providence. It is a part of atheism not to think the acts of God in the world worth our serious thoughts. And if you would know the meaning of his administrations, grow up in the fear of God. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him," Psalm xxv. 14. God is highly angry with those that mind him not—"Because they regard not the operation of his hands; he shall destroy them, and not build them up," Psalm xxviii. 5. He shall utterly root them out.

5. Ascribe the glory of every providence to God. Abraham's steward petitioned God at the beginning of his business, Gen. xxiv. 12; and he blesses God at the success of it, ver. 26, 27. We do not thank the tools which are used in making an engine, and ascribe to them what we owe to the workman's skill: man is but the instrument, God's wisdom is the artist. Let us therefore return the glory of all where it is most rightly due. All the providences of God in the world are conformable to the declarations of his word. All former providences were ultimately in order to the bringing a mediator into the world, and for the glory of him; then, surely, all the providences of God shall be in order to the perfecting the glory of Christ in that mystical body, whereof Christ is head, and wherein his affection and glory are so much concerned. See the proof of this by a scripture or two:—"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep his covenant and his

testimonies," Psalm xxv. 10. Not one path only, but "all" the works and motions—not one particular act of Providence, but the whole tenor of his proceedings—not only those which are more smooth and pleasant, but those which are rugged and bitter. All "mercy and truth," suitable to that affection he bears in his heart to them, and suitable to the declaration of that affection he hath made in his promise. There is a friendly connexion of kindness and faithfulness in every one of them. As mercy made the covenant, so truth shall perform it. And there shall be as much mercy as truth in all God's actings towards those that keep it. "We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose," Rom. viii. 28. "We know;" we do not conjecture, or guess so, but we have an infallible assurance of it from God's word. "All things," even the most frightful, and so those that have in respect to sense, nothing but gall and wormwood in them—"work together:" they all tend with admirable harmony and unanimous consent for a christian's good. One particular act may seem to work to his harm—as one particular act may work to the good of wicked men; but the whole series and frame of things combine together for the good of those that love God—both the lancet that makes us bleed, and the plaster that soothes the pain: both the nauseous potion, and the warming cordials combine together for the patient's cure. "To them that are the called according to his purpose:"—here the apostle renders a reason for this position, because, they are called not only in the general amongst the rest of the world to whom the gospel is offered, but they are such as were in God's counsel and purpose from eternity to save, and therefore he was resolved to incline their will to faith in Christ; therefore all his other

counsels about the affairs of the world shall be for their good.

LVI. Father! whate'er of earthly bliss
Thy sov'reign will denies,
Accepted at thy throne of grace
Let this petition rise.

" Give me a calm, submissive heart,
From every murmur free ;
The blessings of thy grace impart,
And make me live to thee.

" Let the sweet hope that thou art mine,
My life and death attend—
Thy presence thro' my journey shine,
And crown my journey's end."

LVII. Believers may (in this life) be deserted of God, and persecuted by men—very much dissatisfied as to the Lord's likeness in themselves, both in respect to holiness and comfort. We are not by an interest in Christ privileged from trials ; we may have "troubles without," and "fears within." By our turning into the ways of God, we make the world our enemy, we enrage Satan to a further enmity. We do, indeed, engage God to be our father, but he is a wise father, who though he always loves, yet sometimes sees necessary to frown upon his child. But here we must distinguish between a seeming desertion, and a real desertion—between a total and a partial desertion—between a desertion as to the necessary influence of grace, and as to the less necessary influences of it : God cannot cast off his people for ever, he cannot totally desert them ; he cannot withdraw the necessary influences of his grace : the union between Christ and the soul cannot be dissolved, John xiii. 1.

1 Cor. i. 8, 9. There can be no intermission of the state of justification—no total separation of the Spirit from the soul, when once it hath taken up an habitation in it, Phil. i. 6; but as to some influences of grace, not so necessary to salvation, as to consolatory manifestations—as to degrees of quickening and strengthening, God may forsake his children, and that to such a degree, that the soul may (to itself) seem utterly forsaken. True, scripture saith, “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart,” Psalm xcvi. 11. But it is like seed sown into the earth, which comes up sometimes sooner—sometimes later—sometimes not till they arrive at heaven’s gates—sometimes soon after conversion: sometimes they walk all their life-time much in the light of God’s countenance; sometimes they have an April day, with vicissitudes of light and darkness, gleams of sunshine, and then showers; sometimes God appears to their souls in the very hour of death; sometimes again, the light of this life goes out in obscurity to themselves, and they leave this world weeping; yet, carrying with them the precious seed of faith and love, they shall return in the resurrection rejoicing, and bring their sheaves with them, Psalm cxxvi. 6. This may serve to regulate our expectations, that they rise not too high for dispensations not absolutely necessary to salvation—and to direct our charity, that we may not entertain uncharitable thoughts, nor pass uncharitable censures upon those whom we have seen in this life walking with God, yet not dying with sensible comforts. The lot of God’s people, and their great privilege, will be when they awake in the resurrection, to be fully and abundantly satisfied with the Lord’s likeness.

But in order to this privilege, let them

1. At all times keep on, beholding the Lord’s face in

righteousness, that is, in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, walking with God in sincerity and uprightness ; exercising themselves “to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men,” Acts xxiv. 16. Continually labouring “to perfect holiness in the fear of God,” 2 Cor. vii. 1 ; to be much in prayer—much in the exercise of faith, hope, and patience.

2. Especially are they to take care that in their hours of darkness they be not wanting in that exercise. And, doing this, they ought so to be satisfied as not to murmur or repine, nor to think God deals hardly with them ; but to be submissive, rejoicing themselves in this confidence, that when they shall awake in the resurrection, they shall have all that their hearts can desire.

How many poor souls are there who truly fear God, yet never attain to this. How many, who, though Christ be in them, “the hope of glory,” Col. i. 27 ; though they cannot deny what God has done for their souls ; their souls tell them, that they have put their trust in God, and committed themselves to the arms of everlasting righteousness ; they dare not willingly offend God : yet, possibly, at present, they have not those sensible comforts which others have, and which they desire ; they cannot be satisfied, but are ready to complain ; and like a testy child, to throw away, and despise all they have, because they cannot obtain that which they so passionately desire : they see no ground of hope ; they are persuaded that, at last, they shall sink down to hell, and one day perish with all their profession : they can find no witnessings—no sealings of God’s Spirit. How often do we hear these, and such like sad expressions from them ! But, O christian, I beseech you to consider how many thousands there are in the world, who have (as creatures) as much claim to God as you, for

whom the Lord hath not done so much as he hath done for you ; he hath given them portions in this life, and hath sent them away ; they have pleasure, riches, honors, but no faith, no hope, nothing of grace, no interest in Christ ; they are dead in trespasses and sins, perishing to all eternity ; you only want a spiritual feast ; the most want spiritual bread, yet creatures under the same natural capacity that you are. Though in one sense you be not sealed, yet in another sense you are sealed. You read in scripture of the sealing of the Spirit, Eph. i. 13 ; chap. iv. 30. 2 Cor. i. 22. We usually interpret these texts of assurance, but perhaps there is another sense as agreeable to the mind of the Holy Ghost. A seal you know, leaves the impression of itself on the wax, the wax hath the image of the seal upon it. The Lord's renewing and stamping his image upon the soul, is the sealing of it to "the day of redemption." There is a seal of regeneration and sanctification, as well as a seal of assurance ; and though the latter sealing be infinitely sweet and pleasant to the soul, yet the former is that which maketh us meet for the kingdom of heaven. Is there not as much think you, of the operation of the Spirit seen in sanctifying, quickening and strengthening a soul as in comforting it, and assuring it of salvation ? Is it not our great mistake, that we will look upon nothing as the fruit of the Spirit, but joy and peace ; certainly the strengthening and quickening the soul in the performance of duty, or in the resistance of corruption, is as much the work of the Spirit in the soul, as comforting and refreshing it. If, therefore, God hath enabled you thus far to watch for his likeness, he hath given you " better things, and things which accompany salvation," Heb. vi. 9. What you have not, a soul may want, and yet get to heaven. Faith and holiness are

the “things which accompany salvation.” But a soul may go to heaven without joy or peace. When God hath given you the bread of life, have you not reason to be satisfied, though you want that banquet with which he sometimes is pleased to feast the souls of his people? The wise man saith, “no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them” in this life, Eccles. ix. 1. So that none ought to determine concerning himself in this matter, from any external dispensations of Providence. A christian may be poor and afflicted, and yet a favorite of God; and as he ought not to judge himself from these more external dispensations, so neither ought he to judge himself from the want of suitable manifestations to his inward soul. The child of God may walk in darkness; Job, David, Heman, Asaph, all had their dark hours; if, therefore, that be our lot, yet this is no ground for despair—no ground for any sad conclusion against our souls, as to their best interests.

Lastly—then, since it is the lot of God’s people sometimes “to walk in darkness and see no light,” let me give you a few rules for your consideration under such a grievous dispensation:—

1. Murmur not, neither repine against God.
2. Do not leave looking to God, though it please not God to look upon you with such a kind aspect as you desire. Do not give over waiting upon him in prayer, and in all his ordinances; but, on the contrary, appear often before him, and plead the righteousness of Christ, walking close with him, “perfecting holiness in the fear of God,” 2 Cor. vii. 1.
3. Keep your watch; take heed of spiritual sleep—of giving way to temptation, or to your own inbred corruptions.
4. “Walk by faith, and not by sight,” 2 Cor. v. 7.

Believe for that you do not see, hope for him you cannot behold, and "let patience have her perfect work," James i. 4. "Wait for the Lord :" never yet was a waiting soul disappointed, nor a believing soul confounded. Do this, and satisfy yourself with David, that when you awake in the resurrection of the just, you shall be abundantly satisfied with the Lord's likeness. "Wherefore, comfort one another with these words," 1 Thess. iv. 18.

LVIII. Why should the children of a king
 Go mourning all their days ?
 Great Comforter ! descend and bring
 Some tokens of thy grace.

Dost thou not dwell in all the saints,
 And seal the heirs of heav'n ?
 When wilt thou banish my complaints,
 And show my sins forgiv'n ?

Assure my conscience of her part
 In the Redeemer's blood ;
 And bear thy witness with my heart,
 That I am born of God.

Thou art the earnest of his love,
 The pledge of joys to come ;
 And thy soft wings, celestial dove,
 Will safe convey me home.

LIX. Men have either no thoughts, or such unworthy ones of that blessed state which is offered in God's promises, that they neglect it altogether, or look only to things present, not heeding the great "recompense of reward." Our thoughts fly up and down like dust before the wind ; they may sometimes light upon better things, but they vanish and abide not. We may have some cold

and ineffectual glances towards heaven and heavenly things, but they soon flee away, and leave the soul never the better. This proves hope to be very weak, if there be any at all ; for true hope is always longing and looking out for the blessing—sending spies into the land of promise, to bring good tidings thence ; it will discover itself, not by glances and wishes, for the ungodly may have some of these at times, but by frequent, deep, and serious meditations. We do not eye the “mark” set before us by the apostle, Phil. iii. 14—“the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ;”—“we look at the things that are seen,” and not the invisible things that faith holds up to our expectation. For what is living by faith, but withdrawing the mind from present things, to things to come, looking above and beyond the world to eternity ? 2 Cor. v. 7. Heb. xi. 10. If so, we are not acquainted with the spirit of wisdom and revelation. For he openeth the eyes of the mind. Why ? That we may look above the clouds and mists of this lower world, to those things we are to enjoy in heaven, Eph. i. 17, 18. 1 Cor. ii. 12. But alas ! we are taken up with trifles, and have our thoughts little exercised about these nobler objects. Therefore is it, that our diligence is so little ; for if they were oftener minded, they would be more diligently sought after. Therefore is our patience so little ; for the bitterness of the cross would be sweetened, if our hearts and thoughts were set upon heaven and heavenly things, Rom. viii. 18. Therefore are our desires and longings so cold and weak, and we have so little mind to get home, which is “**FAR, FAR** better ;” πολὺ μᾶλλον ἀπόστασις, Phil. i. 23.

The promise is our warrant to press us to eye the promised blessedness, and the thing promised is the comfort and support of our souls. The promise must be

laid up in the heart, with a firm, strong assent, and the thing promised ever kept in view.

1. It must be a serious and earnest expectation. "According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed," Phil. i. 20. The Psalmist describes it, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning. I say, more than they that watch for the morning," Psalm cxxx. 5, 6. Thus he reneweth his longings and his hopes.

2. It is a lively hope—"Begotten again unto a lively hope," Peter i. 3. It is called lively from its effect, such as will put life into us under all depression of spirit, under our greatest discouragements; it quickens our pace towards home, being animated by some cheerful fore-taste of what we expect.

3. It is an unconquerable and constant expectation, not overcome by present difficulties; it sustains the soul, till our full and final deliverance is at hand. "As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and the eyes of maidens unto the hand of their mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us," Psalm cxxiii. 2. They never give over waiting and looking, till God show mercy. "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end, for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ," 1 Peter i. 13. "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end," Heb. vi. 11.

4. It is a sure and certain hope, as being built upon God's truth and faithfulness: it is compared to "an anchor both sure and stedfast," Heb. vi. 19. Why? Because of God's word and oath. God is the supreme verity,

who can neither deceive, nor be deceived; therefore we ought to rest satisfied with his promise. To a promise, that it be certain and firm, three things are required; that it be made seriously, and heartily, with a full purpose to perform it:—that he that promiseth, continue in this purpose without change of mind: that it be in the power of him that promised, to perform what is promised. Now of all these things there can be no doubt, if we believe the scriptures to be the word of God; for certainly God meaneth as he speaketh, when he promises eternal life to the faithful servants and disciples of Jesus Christ. There is no question but he is so minded, when he who is truth itself, hath told us so. For what needed God to court the creature, or to tell him of an happiness which he never meant to bestow upon him? Yea, we have his oath, which is “for confirmation, and an end of all strife,” Heb. vi. 16. He sent his Son with a commission from heaven to assure us, “he is the Amen, the faithful and true witness,” Rev. iii. 14. He wrought miracles to confirm his message—died, rose again, and revived; “that your faith and hope might be in God,” 1 Peter i. 21. This message afterwards was confirmed by all kinds of signs and wonders, wrought by them who went about in his name, to assure the world of it. Not to believe God is to make him a liar! That God doth continue his purpose there can be no doubt, if we consider his unchangeable nature. “Every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is NO VARIABLENESS, neither SHADOW OF TURNING,” James i. 17. “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed,” Malachi iii. 6.

God is able to perform it, since he can do what he will. “And being fully persuaded that what he had

promised, he was able also to perform," Rom. iv. 21. "According to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself," Phil. iii. 21. The most difficult thing in our hope is the raising of our bodies, after being eaten by worms, and turned to dust. It is a thing incredible, and to flesh and blood wholly impossible; but "nothing is impossible with God." It is within the reach and compass of Divine Omnipotence. Since then the thing is sure in itself; let us labour and suffer reproach—wait with patience—renounce the desires and delights of the flesh—continue in well-doing, and then we may lift up our souls. The issue is sure.

LX. Light of those, whose dreary dwelling

Borders on the shades of death,

Come, and, by thy love's revealing,

Dissipate the clouds beneath;

The new heaven and earth's Creator,

In our deepest darkness rise,

Scatt'ring all the night of nature,

Pouring eyesight on our eyes.

Still we wait for thy appearing;

Life and joy thy beams impart,

Chasing all our doubts, and cheering

Ev'ry poor benighted heart:

Come, and manifest the favor

God hath for our ransom'd race;

Come, sweet Advocate and Saviour,

Come, and bring thy gospel grace.

Save us in thy great compassion,

O thou mild and gracious Prince!

Give the knowledge of salvation,

Give the pardon of our sins:

By thine all-sufficient merit

Every burden'd soul release;

By the shinings of thy Spirit

Guide us into perfect peace.

LXI. It is faith's work to still the disquietments of the soul ; and this it doth in various ways. It persuades the soul of God's lovingkindness to the redeemed ; it begets in the soul a good opinion of God, and removes hard thoughts of him, which are ready to arise under trouble. It enlightens the soul as to the true nature of God, who hath said, " I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil," Jer. xxix. 11. To this end it instructs the soul of God's power and mercy—of God's providence and care—of God's truth and faithfulness. It is a sinful jealousy of God that causes distrust of him ; either an ignorance of him, or hard thoughts concerning him ; either not knowing what he is to the soul, or suspecting he will not be what he hath said he would be.

1. Then faith persuades the soul of the fulness of sufficiency, power, and mercy that is in God for his people, through Christ, either in the loss or want of some temporal blessing, as Elijah, Rachel, and Jonah were. Now faith teaches by the word, that " God is all-sufficient." Doth not the word of God say that, all is thine, if thou art Christ's ? Mayest thou not go to that fountain of all blessings, and thus, by persuading thy soul of God's present all-sufficiency for it, quiet it ?

2. By persuading the soul of God's power. The christian is troubled for the loss of some outward thing. Faith asks, Cannot God restore these things either in actual possession, or in an equivalent for them ? Remember Job's case, how the Lord made his latter end greater than his beginning. Why, therefore, art thou troubled, as one without hope ?

3. By persuading the soul of God's mercy and loving-kindness. Can God do it, and will he not ? He can, because he is power, and there is nothing too hard for

him :—he will because he is love. His power is only limited by his will, and he is not more able, than willing, to be gracious. Now, can God restore thee thy earthly comfort, and can he pardon thee thy great sins, and will he not do it? Believe it—he can and will.

4. By persuading the soul of God's providence. Hath a christian lost any earthly comfort? Why, this is God's doing, saith faith; “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground, without your Father.” The Lord sees what is befallen thee—he knows thy condition. Why art thou troubled?

5. It further persuades the soul of the wisdom of God in the dispensations of his providence. This is not only God's doing, but it is God's wise doing—no rash act, but done out of a depth of predeterminate counsel. It was decreed in wisdom, that thou shouldest lose this or that comfort, in which thou thoughtest so much of thy happiness was wrapped up. What is done, is the work of God, and in wisdom he does it all, Psalm civ. 24.

6. Faith sets forth to the soul the sovereignty of God:—that God hath done no more than he might do, without asking any one's leave. Hath he broken our clay vessels? It is no more than he might do, for he is our potter, and we are but as clay in the hands of the potter, Jer. xviii. 6. Isaiah lxiv. 8. Hath he left my soul without light? May he not do it? For “the wind bloweth where it listeth,” and asks no one's leave; nor gives an account to any why it doth so: this stills the soul.—“I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it,” Psalm xxxix. 9. If thine—who can question it? Who shall say to the King of kings, “What doest thou?”

7. Faith doth it also by persuading the soul of the truth and faithfulness of God, and that either in his par-

ticular promises, relating to the present want and condition of the soul: it persuades the soul that there is not one word in his promises but shall be fulfilled, as sure as God is in heaven: heaven and earth may pass away, but not a word of these shall;—or, in persuading the soul of God's faithfulness to his general promises. God in his word hath made some general promises, that are comprehensive, as Psalm lxxxiv. 11, “The Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly;” so Psalm xci. 10, “There shall no evil befall thee.” Now if there be a particular promise wanting, peculiar to the present condition of the soul, then it is the work of faith in the soul to persuade it of the truth of the general promises. Whether it fear it shall not obtain something which it conceives to be good, or be disquieted for some evil which it apprehends, either already upon it, or likely to come. Now if the promises be true, it is but thy misinterpretation of the condition thou art in; for the present things befallen thee, if thou art a child of God, are good, whatever thou fearest, and shall work for thy good. Thus faith quiets the troubled spirit.

Another work of faith upon the soul to still it is, by teaching it to commit itself to God, “Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you,” 1 Peter v. 7. Reliance is the marrow of faith; faith first shows the soul what there is in God to be trusted, and relied upon, that will bring it relief in due time, and then stirs up the soul to a trusting in him. “Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him,” Psalm xlii. 11. “The Lord is my rock and my fortress, and my deliverer: my God, my strength, in whom I will trust.” First, faith had then discovered to David, what there was in God, what a fulness of sufficiency and power, and then

it leads him to trust in his God, in whom was such a fulness ; now the soul's disquietment is allayed by this ; it feels its comfort lost, but faith bids it look forward “ and hope in God, for it shall yet praise him.” It teaches the soul to commit its cause to God ; and when it has wrought up the soul to this, to neglect itself, to look out of itself and its own feelings wholly, and to commit its cause to God, this allays its restlessness and disquietments. It teaches it also to wait upon God and stay his leisure. “ He that believeth shall not make haste,” saith the prophet, Isaiah xxviii. 16. “ Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him,” Psalm xxxvii. 7. The soul maketh haste several ways ; it may be too hasty in the desires of its heart, its words, or its actions. A soul makes haste when it desires a mercy before God's time, and for want of this is disquieted ; because, what it would have, comes not at its expected season ; but now he that believes, waits God's time ; depends upon God for a desired mercy ; looks for him, in a diligent attendance upon such means, as God hath appointed, to convey such a mercy in or by, and to possess his soul with patience, till God shall please to reveal himself. If he do not wait, it is a plain evidence, that the soul doth not trust God. A further work of faith upon the soul, is contentment and submission. It fills the soul with God, and gives it enough in him. “ I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound : everywhere, and in all things, I am instructed, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound, and to suffer need ; I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,” Phil. iv. 11. And how came the apostle to have an interest in Christ, and to draw this strength out of Christ, but by faith ? It teaches the soul to be content with

God and Jesus Christ, though it hath nothing else—and to be submissive to God's dispensations, be they what they may. This is done by creating in the soul a true sight of the riches and excellency that is in God: and also by persuading it of the love of God towards it—the care of God for it, and the mixture of wisdom in all his dealings. Now, if the soul be wrought into such a frame that it can be content with God, as enough; though it want all other things, and that it can be content with God's dispensations, because they are his, it takes away all cause of disquietment from the soul.

Lastly—Faith has a power to work up the soul into an assurance of what the word of God holds out as the soul's portion—not only to persuade it and to make it depend upon God, and so set it waiting for God, but to work in the soul a fulness of persuasion, *πληροφορία*. “That what he had promised, he is able also to perform,” Rom. iv. 21. Faith, I say, hath this power so effectually, to apply any promise, as to make the soul believe it, though afar off, as thoroughly, as if it were already at hand.—So much so, as it shall be like Abraham, who, when he saw Christ's day, rejoiced, though he rejoiced only in hope.

To give some directions to such poor christians, as walk heavily, and with troubled spirits—what to do to remove their burdens, and to clear up their souls in the way to heaven,—

1. Meditate a little, what there is, and must be of God, in the evil, which thou feelest or fearest. There must be his privity in it. Is it come? It came not when God was asleep, “for he that keepeth thee, will not slumber,” Psalm cxxi. 3. Is it to come? It shall not come without his knowledge. And does he know it? Then be not thou troubled, “For he that is higher than the

highest, regardeth it," Eccles. v. 8. Dost thou see a black cloud of evil coming upon thee? Be not troubled, God knows of it, and could prevent it, if he pleased; he would prevent it, if he did not know it would be for thy good:—he knows every hair that falleth from his children's head. Nay, that is not all, whatever comes upon thee, is the Lord's doing, Psalm xxxix. 9; and again, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" Amos iii. 6. Why art thou troubled then, christian? Hear what Christ hath said, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Christian, it is the cup that thy Father hath mingled for thee, and given thee to drink. Wilt thou not drink it? This consideration quieted the Lord Jesus Christ, who was about to suffer the saddest sufferings of any. Consider, too, it is not only your Father's will to send it, but it is also your Father's will that you should suffer, "possessing your souls in patience," Luke xxi. 19. It was but written in the volume of God's book, Psalm xl. 7, that Christ should come and do his will: he presently says, "Lo, I come:" and yet in that submission, he lost more—he felt more—he suffered more than ever any creature did. Whatever thou hast lost, let this quiet thee:—it was the will of God, and it was not only the will of God that such an evil should befall thee, but that thou shouldest quietly submit to it.

2. God uses not to do any acts that shall have merely will in them, and be mere declarations of his sovereignty, and demonstrations of his power. Consider, therefore, the infinite wisdom of God in every dispensation that concerns thee. Thou mayest not be able to understand his works. But, is he not mighty in wisdom? Job xxxvi. 5. All his actions are in wisdom! Then, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou dis-

quieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

LXII. When darkness long has veil'd my mind,
And smiling day once more appears,
Then, my Redeemer, then I find
The folly of my doubts and fears.

Straight I upbraid my faithless heart,
And blush, that I should ever be
Thus prone to act so base a part,
Or harbour one hard thought of thee!

O! let me then at length be taught,
What I am still so slow to learn,
That "God is love," and changes not,
Nor knows the shadow of a turn.

Sweet truth, and easy to repeat!
But, when my faith is sharply try'd,
I find myself a learner yet,
Unskilful, weak, and apt to slide.

But, O my Lord, one look from thee
Subdues the disobedient will,
Drives doubt and discontent away,
And thy rebellious worm is still.

Thou art as ready to forgive
As I am ready to repine;
Thou, therefore, all the praise receive,—
Be shame and self-abhorrence mine.

LXIII. Trust in God never issues in confounding disappointments. Both Jesus and Jehovah's righteousness secure to believing suppliants a deliverance out of every trouble and snare; and fervent prayers in Jesus' name ensure a favorable answer in God's own

time—which is the best time. The more we commit ourselves to God, the more we shall experience his faithfulness in performing his promises ; and the more we know of his redeeming love, power, and grace, the more fully shall we commit ourselves to his care in life or in death. When God is our portion we may renounce everything else as lying vanities. And his unceasing mercies, his protection from evils, his sympathy under troubles, and his increase of blessings deserve our constant return of praise. But though the sins of believers cannot damn them, yet they often severely distress them on earth. And through much conformity to Christ, in the enduring of hatred, reproach, and persecution, they must enter into the heavenly kingdom. The ungodly often abandon themselves to the most false and virulent reproaches against Jesus Christ and his people ; but distress, death, and judgment, will quickly silence them. Meanwhile, God's present protection of his people, and the unbounded happiness of heaven, should be comforts more than sufficient to balance all the troubles of time. Often his great and unexpected mercies shame their unbelief, and rebuke their carnal fear. And O, what reason the best have to bewail their repeated and deep despondencies under trouble, and to encourage others to avoid them ! For, when we consider our God and his mercies, how cold is our love, how weak our faith, and languid our hopes ! The remains of sin in the renewed nature must be purged out by sore troubles, and wounding convictions ; for there is a close connection between gospel repentance and pardon of sin. It is not, however, our repentance, but God's mercy in Christ as the perfect atonement, that is the cause of our pardon. Hopeful is his case, that is once brought to humble applications to a gracious God, who

is more ready to pardon, than we are to pray for it. They who seek him, even in troubles, shall surely find him ; the more imminently terrible their danger, the more shall his free grace and love be magnified in their salvation. And it is no small encouragement to their seeking of God in their distress, that others have found him a present help in like cases. But great is the protection, preservation, deliverance, instruction and direction, which God bestows upon his pardoned ones, while the impenitent are loaded with sorrows, everlasting and unnumbered. It is necessary then, to receive his instructions, and to bend before his warnings, that we may eventually rejoice in his mercy, and triumph in his praise. All that God is in himself—all that he hath declared in his word—all that he hath done in his works belong to his peculiar people. Thrice happy are they who have the Lord for their God ! He is their portion—their kind observer—their powerful protector—their almighty deliverer—their gracious provider, and constant preserver, even unto death ! The thoughts of his universal power, influence, and operations, and the utter vanity of all things beside him, ought effectually to engage us to a contented resignation of ourselves, and all that we have, into his hand.

LXIV. The necessities of the soul are such, that worldly things or worldly comforts are not able to supply them. Natural things may serve for natural wants ; food will satisfy hunger, raiment fence off the severity of the weather, and riches will procure both : but the soul's necessities are spiritual, and these no natural thing can reach. It wants a price to redeem it ; nothing can do this but the precious blood of Christ. It wants pardon and forgiveness ; nothing can give it, but the free

and abundant mercy of God. It wants sanctification and holiness—comfort and assurance ; nothing can effect these but the Holy Ghost. Here, all worldly things fall short. The wants of the outward man they may supply, but the greatest abundance of them, can never quiet a troubled conscience—nor appease an angry God —nor remove the condemning guilt of the least sin. No, “the redemption of the soul is precious,” (more precious, than to be purchased by such poor things), “and it ceaseth for ever,” Psalm xlix. 8.

Men, in time of peace and prosperity, regard not these spiritual wants ; but, when the days of sorrow and darkness come upon them—when God shall drop into their consciences a little of his wrath and displeasure, they may as well seek to cure a wound in their body, by applying a plaster on their garment, as seek to ease “a wounded spirit,” by all the treasures, pleasures, and enjoyments of this world. “Riches,” saith the wise man, “profit not in the day of wrath,” Prov. xi. 4; for indeed, they cannot reach the soul, to bring any real comfort to it.

Thus you see, how unsuitable the world is to the nature of the soul—for the soul is spiritual, but all earthly enjoyments are material—the soul is immortal, but these are all perishing, unsuitable to the necessities of the soul, which they can never reach nor supply.

The vanity of the world, too, appears in its inconstancy and fickleness.

God’s providence administers all things here below, even the most trifling, Matt. x. 29, in perpetual vicissitudes. His hand turns them about like so many wheels, Ezek. i. The same part is now uppermost, and anon, lowermost—now, lifted up in the air, and

by-and-by, dragged through the mire. This is the changeable condition of the world.

There are few of us, but have had some bitter experience, in one kind or another, of the inconstancy of these sublunary enjoyments.

When the sun shines bright and warm, all the flowers of the field open and display their leaves, to receive its warmth into their bosoms ; but, when night comes, they fold together, and shut up all their beauty : and when the sun withdraws its beams, they droop, and hang their head. So hath it fared with us ; while God hath shone upon us with warm and cherishing influence, we opened, and spread, and flourished : but he only hides his face, draws in his beams, and all our leaves shut up, or fall to the ground ; and leave us a poor, bare, and withered stalk.

Great and sudden changes are often brought to pass, without being ripened by sensible degrees, but happen by the surprisal of some unexpected providence. It is true, these changes which to us seem so confused and tumultuous, are all orderly and harmonious in the Divine counsel and foreknowledge. There is not a providence that breaks its rank, nor a wheel that moves out of its track ; and there is a destined end for them all, the glory of the Almighty Creator ; to which, while every creature seems to pursue its own inclinations, he sweetly, yet, efficaciously, sways them. They are all like arrows shot at a mark by an unerring hand. Some are shot point blank, and some by compass ; but none so carelessly as to miss it.

Though changes may surprise us, yet they do not surprise God ; but, as it is a great pleasure to us to see our designs and forecasts accomplished ; so, Infinite Wisdom delights itself to look on and see how all things start up

into their place and order, as soon as called forth by his efficacious decree and foreknowledge. So that, when we cannot find out the connexion and dependance of second causes, we may humbly acquiesce in adoring the absolute sovereignty of the first ; and, by observing the mutations of affairs here below, may be taught to repose ourselves in Him, who only is immutable. Thus God administers the various occurrences of the world according to the counsels of his own will ; and makes the inconstancy of it serve both for his delight, and our admonition.

It is vain, and worse than vain, therefore, to expect happiness from what is so uncertain. All the comforts of such a state, are but like fading flowers, that, while we are looking on them, and smelling to them, die and wither in our hands.

The vanity of the world appears further in this, that it is altogether unsatisfactory. When we enjoy it in its greatest abundance, it can give no solid and real content. Such an empty thing is the whole world, you may as soon grasp a shadow, as fill the vast and boundless desires of your souls with these earthly enjoyments. All the prosperity of this world, is but as the image and fiction of a dream. “It is as when an hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth ; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty,” Isaiah xxix. 8 : so it is with us in this world. While the soul lies under the coverlet of the flesh, it sleeps : but, when either afflictions or death call upon it, the sleepy soul awakes, and finds itself hungry and empty, after all the imaginary store it enjoyed.

It is not, therefore, anything in this world, that can give you satisfaction. Indeed, so vain are they, that they scarce have any other proof of their reality, than the pain or torment they bring with them. Nothing can fill the soul, but that, which eminently contains in itself,

all good. But now, as light is only divided and parceled out among the stars, but is all united in the sun ; so goodness is only parceled out among the creatures ; this creature hath one share, and that another ; not any one of them contains the whole sum of goodness : this is proper to God only, who is the author and original of them all ; in whom all excellencies and perfections are concentrated ; and therefore, in him alone can be found that rest and satisfaction, which the soul in vain seeks for, in anything besides himself. The knowledge of this, should teach us to admire and adore the good providence of God to his children, in so ordering it, that the world should be thus vain, and deal so ill with those who serve it. For, if it were not so deceitful as it is—if it did not frustrate and disappoint our hopes ; and pay us with vexations, when it promises enjoyment and content, what thinkest thou, O christian, would be the end of this ? Would any one think of God, or remember heaven, and the life to come ? Augustine, somewhere speaks excellently, “The world troubles me and molests me, yet I love it. What if it did not trouble me ?” Certainly, we should fall into an utter forgetfulness of God, if we could find any true satisfaction here. We should never think of returning to the “fountain of living waters,” if we could find enough in cisterns to quench the thirst of our souls.

Let us learn, then, to seek those things which are above, which are able to satisfy the immortal soul. Let us rest satisfied with our present state and condition, whatsoever it be. There can be no complete satisfaction in any state. Why then should we desire change ? The great ground of discontent is, not our wants, but our desires. That, which we have, be it never so little, is full as satisfactory, as that which we hope for, be it

never so great : for vanity and vexation of spirit, are passed upon all that is in the world, whether it be more or less. And, therefore, O christian, thou mayest well bear thy state in the world, whatever that may be. Possibly God keeps thee low, that he might bestow upon thee that which is a solid and substantial good. The Psalmist tells us, that "God daily loadeth us with benefits," Psalm lxviii. 19. Though some have more than others, yet, every one hath his load, as much as he can carry. Every vessel cannot carry the same sail ; and, therefore, God to keep us from oversetting, only hoists up so much sail, as will safest bring us to heaven, our desired port.

Let us cast then, all these cares and burdens upon him, who hath promised to sustain us, Psalm lv. 22, and turn the stream of our desires heavenwards, where alone, we can find permanent and real good. "Walk humbly with thy God," Micah vi. 8. Keep yourselves always in an awful fear of his dread majesty. Be constant in the exercise of grace and the performance of duty. These are the only things exempt from vanity and vexation : in these alone can the soul find rest and contentment. And therefore, Solomon, after he searched through all the world, and pronounced riches, strength, beauty, wisdom, learning, all to be vanity and vexation, rests himself on this, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." It is his whole duty, and his only happiness in this life.

LXV. Now with every good we find
Vanity and grief entwined ;
What we feel, or what we fear,
All our joys embitter here.

Yet, thro' the Redeemer's love,
These afflictions blessings prove ;
He the wounding stings and thorns
Into healing medicines turns.

From the earth our hearts they wean,
Teach us on his arm to lean ;
Urge us to a throne of grace,
Make us seek a resting place.

In the mansions of our King,
Sweets abound without a sting ;
Thornless there the roses blow
And the joys unmingle flow.

LXVI. O how safe is the christian in the love, and covenant, and arms of an almighty God, whom he hath made his refuge ! Our trials are many, and grace received is small, in the best ; but our God is great ; He that made all things—sustaineth all things—governeth all things—and possesseth all things, is our God. Surely, “his grace is sufficient for us,” 2 Cor. xii. 9 ; and his arms can bear us up, Deut. xxxiii. 27. He can recover us from our falls, and lift us up over all our difficulties—if we could but rest upon his word, and lean upon his power. Why should we be discouraged ? O let us then not only rejoice in the goodness, but the greatness of that God, “whose we are, and whom we serve,” Acts xxvii. 23. The stability of His works sheweth how stable the workman is. Heaven and earth continue by virtue of His word, that man may have the benefit of it from generation to generation ; that the continual vicissitudes of day and night may be continued ; that man may have light to his labour, and darkness drawn about him as a covering for his rest ; and also that there may be a continual succession of summer and winter, to pre-

pare and ripen the fruits of the earth. Now if God forsake not the world, will he forsake his own people? For the benefit of mankind he preserveth the courses of nature, and keepeth all things in their proper place, for their proper end and use—and will he not much rather preserve his own children? Shall there be a failure in the covenant made with his dear Son, when there is not a failure in common providence? As if God would satisfy the expectations of heathens, that look for a constant succession of day and night, and summer and winter, and would disappoint the expectation of his own children, when they look for a blessed morning after a dark night of trouble and conflict: and the light of his countenance, after the storms of temptation. God's appointment giveth laws to all; there is not the least thing done among us, without his prescience, providence, and wise disposal, to which all things in the world are subjected. The Lord's will and pleasure are the only rule of his extending his omnipotency, and are the sovereign and absolute cause of all his working, for all is done in heaven and in earth, according to his ordinances; no creature can resist his will, therefore, let us submit to this will of God. If God take anything from us, let us bless the name of the Lord, he doth but make use of his own. "It is the Lord," 1 Sam. iii. 18. It is none of ours, but God's, let him do with his own as it pleaseth him. God is the disposer of man, as well as other creatures, and must choose their condition, and determine all events, wherein they are concerned. We often murmur at God's disposal of us, though it be so wise and gracious; but consider his sovereignty—can you deliver yourselves from the will of God, and get the reins into your own hands? And could we do so—alas! we are as unfit to be the disposers

either of the world or ourselves, as an idiot is to be the pilot of a ship: therefore, let God govern all, according to his own pleasure; say, "Lord, not my will, but thine be done." We are safer by far in God's hands, than in our own. All creatures do serve God as his word hath ordained, so should we; we have law and ordinances too. Shall men alone be eccentric and transgress his bounds? Winds and sea serve Him that made them, only man, made after God's own image, disobeys him. All creatures serve him for our benefit:—when all things are created and continued for our use, shall we not serve our bountiful Creator? We are sensible of the disturbance of the course of nature, when floods increase, or rains fall in abundance. Oh! let us then bemoan our own irregular actions, which are a greater deformity to the beauty of the universe.

In short, no creature is at his own disposal; he is subject to God, by whose word and commandment he must rule his actions; surely, none of us are too great, or too good, to submit to God. Angels enjoy immunities, yet are not exempted from service; let man obey God, and humbly submit to his will and pleasure, though contrary to his own perverse inclinations.

LXVII. If to Jesus for relief

My soul has fled by pray'r,
Why should I give way to grief,
Or heart-consuming care?
Are not all things in his hand?
Has he not his promise pass'd?
Will he then regardless stand,
And let me sink at last?

While I know his providence
Disposes each event,

Shall I judge by feeble sense,
 And yield to discontent?
 If he worms and sparrows feed,
 Clothe the grass in rich array (Matt. vi. 26),
 Can he see a child in need,
 And turn his eye away?

When his name was quite unknown,
 And sin my life employ'd,
 Then he watch'd me as his own,
 Or I had been destroy'd :
 Now his mercy-seat I know,
 Now by grace am reconcil'd ;
 Would he spare me while a foe,
 To leave me when a child? (Rom. v. 10).

If he all my wants supply'd,
 When I disdain'd to pray,
 Now his Spirit is my guide,
 How can he say me nay?
 If he would not give me up
 When my soul against him fought,
 Will he disappoint the hope,
 Which he himself has wrought?

If he shed his precious blood
 To bring me to his fold,
 Can I think that meaner good
 He ever will withhold? (Rom. viii. 32).
 Satan, vain is thy device!
 Here my hope rests well assur'd ;
 In that great redemption-price
 I see the whole secur'd.

LXVIII. It doth concern us to consider the voice of God in all afflictions; and to improve them, so as to make God in Christ our only standing refuge. And certainly, if afflictions do cause us to turn our eyes

directly upon him, and to centre in him alone, we shall find him, what he hath promised to be, "The husband of the widow, and father of the fatherless." In every trouble, our wisest course is, to endeavour to learn what God is pleased to say to our souls therein; which is to get the hearts of his people more united to himself by faith and resignation: for though the things and persons of this world do wither and fade, yet God himself is the Rock of Ages; and hath promised, "The righteous shall not be utterly desolate;" for in the fire and in the water he will be with them. And, therefore, let us endeavour rather to improve our affliction by faith, for spiritual uses, than waste away our thoughts unprofitably through unbelief, in pondering and dejecting our hearts, under these outward trials, though they be great. Therefore, let us read and meditate the word, where provision of support is made, to answer all cases of distress. Let us spread our souls often before the Lord—open the bottom of our hearts to him—fly to the blood of Christ for daily atonement—give ourselves up to him, who has said, "Cast thy burden on the Lord, and he shall sustain thee;" and then we shall see reason, at length, to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted," Psalm cxix. 71; and, that they are blessed whom God afflicts, and teaches his law. For this purpose, let us pray, that we may have the gracious shelter of his love and compassion in every condition.

LXIX. The faithfulness of God, in his nature, should move those whom he hath called and justified to trust in him, as a faithful Creator. He is, I AM, always like himself, immutable, unchangeable. The word that comes from God is an expression of that faithfulness, as the Psalmist saith, "Thou art good and doest good," Psalm

cxix. 68. God being faithful in himself, all must needs be so that proceeds from him : whatsoever relation God takes upon himself—he is faithful therein :—as he is a Creator, so he preserves and maintains his own work : as he is a Father, he is faithful in discharging that duty to the full, for his children's good : as he is our friend, he likewise performs all the duties of that relation. And why doth God stoop so low to take these relations upon himself, but only to show that he will certainly accomplish the same to the utmost : “All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth,” Psalm xxv. 10. They are not only merciful and true, but mercy and truth itself. If he show himself to be a father, he is a true father, a true friend, a true Creator and protector. All other faithfulness is but a beam of that which is in God. Shall not he, then, be most faithful, that makes other things to be faithful ? Now this faithfulness of God is a ground for our committing ourselves unto him, and surely we may trust him, whose word has been tried seven times in the fire, Psalm xii. 6. There is no dross in it ; every word of God is a sure word, his truth is a “shield and buckler,” Psalm xci. 4 ; we may well trust in it :—therefore, when you read of any singular promise in the New Testament, it is said, “This is a faithful saying,” 1 Tim. i. 15 ; that is, this is such a word as we may trust to, it is the word of a faithful Creator. Considering then that God is so “faithful,” every way in his promises, and in his deeds, let us make especial use of it—treasure up all the promises we can of the forgiveness of sins—of protection and preservation, that he will never leave us, but be our God unto death, Psalm xlvi. 14 ; and then consider, withal, that he is faithful in performing the same. When we are terrified by his majesty and justice, then think of his mercy and truth. The reason we should make so

much of the word of God is, that it is the word of Jehovah, the mighty Creator, who gives a being to all things, and can alone be Lord and master of his word. We know God's meaning no otherwise than by his word : till we come to the knowledge of vision in heaven, we must be satisfied with the knowledge of revelation in the word. In every promise of God's, single out that which best suits with thy present condition ; if thou be in any great distress, think upon the almighty power of God. "Lord, thou hast made me of nothing, and canst deliver me out of this estate—"say the word, and I shall be safe : behold I flee unto thee for succour." If thou be in any perplexity for want of direction, and know not what to do, single out the attribute of God's wisdom, and desire him to teach thee the way that thou shouldest go. If thou be wronged, flee to his justice, and say, "Oh God, to whom vengeance belongeth, hear and help thy servant." Thou shalt always find in God something to support thy soul in the greatest extremity that can befall thee ; for if there was not in God a fulness to supply every need that we are in, he were not to be worshipped, he were not to be trusted.

Man is lighter than vanity in the balance ; every man is a liar, Psalm lviii. 3 ; that is, he is false, but God is essentially true, he cannot deceive and be God too ; therefore, ever when thou art disappointed with men, retire to God and his promises, "which are yea and amen in Christ Jesus ;" build upon this, that the Lord will not be wanting in anything that may do thee good. With men there is a breach of covenant, nation with nation, and man with man ; there is little trust to be placed in any. But in all confusions—~~HERE~~ is comfort. He that is in Christ Jesus a new creature, may cast himself boldly into the arms of the Almighty, and go to

him in any distress, as to a faithful Creator, that will not forsake him.

Oh let us be ashamed that we should dishonor Him who is ready to pledge his faithfulness and truth for us: "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive them;" faithful, because he has promised; just—the heavy debt having been paid by our surety, he will not demand the payment a second time; neither will he suffer his children "to be tempted above that they are able," 1 Cor. x. 13. When we perplex ourselves with doubts and unbelief, whether he will make good his promise or not, we disable His majesty, Mark vi. 5. Do we think God stands not upon his truth and faithfulness? Undoubtedly he does, and we cannot dishonor him more than to distrust him, especially in his evangelical promises; "We make him a liar," 1 John v. 10; and rob him of that he most glories in.

See the baseness of man's nature; he can trust the ground with sowing his seed, and yet he will not trust God, who made the earth faithful to bring forth fruit; we can trust a vain man, "whose breath is in his nostrils," and look for great matters at his hands, before an all-sufficient God that changeth not. Who makes the seas and the winds faithful, that they do not hurt us, but God? and yet we are ready to trust the wind and weather sooner than God. Let us then lament our want of faith, that having such an omnipotent and faithful Creator to rely upon, yet we cannot bring our hearts to trust him. The two main pillars of a Christian faith are—

1. The power of God.
2. The goodness of God.

Let our estate be never so desperate, yet God is Creator still; let our sins and infirmities be never so great, yet

he hath power to heal them. Oh ! how should this cheer up our fainting souls, and support our drooping spirits in all our strivings and conflicts with sin and Satan, having such an almighty God to fly unto for succour. It is no small privilege for a Christian to have this free access to God in times of extremity—to know that he has “an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,” “who can be touched with the feeling of his infirmities, having been tempted like as he is, yet without sin.” Be his state what it may, take it at the worst, in regard of sin and misery, yet we are his creatures still :—“I am a sinful wretch, yet I am the workmanship of thy hands ; thou hast framed me, and fashioned me, O God.” Surely, had we faith, we would take hold by a little. The soul of man is like the vine, it winds about and fastens upon every little help. Oh ! it is sweet reasoning thus to cling about God, and gather upon him by a special act of faith ; for which purpose we should much eye the sweet invitations of the gospel, alluring us to accept of mercy and deliverance from sin and death—as, “come unto me all ye that are heavy laden,” and so cast the guilt of our souls upon God, to pardon first, and then to sanctify and cleanse us, that we may no more “return to folly,” Prov. xxvi. 11 ; but “that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness,” Eph. iv. 1, 2. Learn, therefore, to know thyself to be in covenant with God, and, to trust him with all thou hast : train up thyself in a continual dependence upon him. He that trusts God with his soul, will surely trust him every day in everything he hath or doth ; he knows well that whatsoever he enjoys is not his own, but God’s, and this stirs him up to commit all his ways and doings to His protection, esteeming nothing safe but what God keeps ; he sees “it is not in man that

walketh to direct his steps," Jer. x. 23 ; and therefore, resigns up his estate—his credit—his calling—his family—whatever is near and dear to him to the blessed care and direction of the Almighty. There is much self-denial to be learned before we can go out of ourselves and commit all to God ; before we can cast ourselves into his arms, and lay ourselves at his feet. Take heed of whatsoever hinders the committing our all unto God, and still remember that God reconciled in Christ is the best **sanc-**
tuary to flee unto. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower : the righteous," that is, he who is accepted in Christ, "runneth into it and is safe," Prov. xviii. 10. Beloved, God will be honored by our trusting him ; and those that will be wiser than God must look for confusion in all their plans.

Moreover, christians should not outrun God's providence, and say—what will become of me ?—this trouble will overwhelm me—this affliction will surely destroy me : but wait upon Divine Providence, in the use of means, and then leave all to his disposal. Especially this is needful in the hour of death, or when some imminent danger approaches ; but then it will be hard work, except it be practised beforehand. Labour therefore, for an assurance of God's love betimes, get infallible evidences of your state in grace, that you are a renewed person, that you are born not only of water but of the spirit, that there is a thorough change wrought in your heart, that God has set a stamp upon you for his own. Then mayest thou cheerfully say, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit ; I am thine, Lord, save me." Oh ! the sweet tranquillity, the heaven upon earth, which those enjoy who have God for their God.

To encourage you the more to trust in God, observe the course of his dealing with you : "Lord, thou hast

been my God from my youth, saith the Psalmist, upon thee have I hung ever since I was taken out of my mother's womb—forsake me not in my grey hairs, when my strength faileth me," Psalm lxxi. 5—9. We should gather upon God, as it were, from former experience of his goodness, and trust him for the time to come, having formerly found him true. Therefore, let us learn daily to observe the experience of his goodness towards us—how when we have committed ourselves to him on former occasions, he hath been a God from time to time, in such and such dangers to us. Ancient christians should be the most advanced christians, because they are enriched by the most experiences. It is a shame for ancient christians to stagger, when they yield up their souls to God, as if they had not been acquainted with him before. In Psalm xxxi. 5., David pleads to God, "Thou hast redeemed me." He goes to former experience of his mercy. This Psalm is a practice of this precept ; here is the precept, "Commit your souls to God as unto a faithful Creator;" here is the practice, "Into thine hand I commend my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth." Therefore, I beseech you, let us treasure up former experiences of God's goodness, so that when extremities come, we may go boldly unto him. To that end, let us observe how faithful he is in discharging the trust committed to him upon all occasions—how he delivers his poor church in the greatest extremities, and—ourselves also, in our worst times :— "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God, therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings," Psalm xxxvi. 7. Daily experience of God's lovingkindness, will make us daily trust in him ; it should be our continual course to observe the **GOODNESS, KINDNESS, FAITHFULNESS**, and other attributes of God,

and often to support our souls with them. Even our very hairs are numbered, our tears are taken notice of, and put into his bottle, Psalm lvi. 8, our steps are told, Job xxxi. 4, our desires known, our groans are not hid, Psalm xxxviii. 9., we shall not lose one sigh for sin, so particular is God's providence : he watcheth continually over us ; there are not any of our members, but they are written in his book, Psalm cxxxix. 16 ; so that he will not suffer a bone to be broken, Psalm xxxiv. 20. We should, therefore, daily resign up our souls to his merciful care, exercising ourselves to walk in his presence. This is that which the scriptures speak of Enoch, who is said to have "walked with God," that is, to have committed himself and his soul to Him, as a faithful Creator. Happy are we, if we have God to go to in our trouble, we may then rest secure. "Though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea," Psalm xlvi. 2, yet we shall be safe. There is a river shall refresh the house of God, ver. 4. There are chambers of Divine protection, that the christian enters into, as the prophet saith, Isaiah xxvi. 20, and God is his habitation still : if a christian had no shelter in the world, yet he hath an abiding place in God continually ; as God dwells in him, so he dwells in God. Satan and all other his enemies must break through God, before they can destroy him, when once he has committed himself to God as a tower and habitation, and sought him as a hiding-place from the tempest, Isaiah xxxii. 3; so blessed a state is it, to be in God, having commended our souls to him. Beloved, when we commit ourselves to God, we are safe ; and if he keep us not out of trouble, yet will he preserve us in trouble. "I will be with thee in the fire, and in the water" (saith God), Isaiah xlivi. 2. He saith not, I will

keep you out of the fire and out of the water, for he brought many holy martyrs into it—some were drowned, some burned. Though God will not keep us out of trouble, yet he will preserve our spirit in trouble; nay God often makes the troubles of the godly a preservation to them. Was not Jonah preserved by the whale? What had become of him, if the whale had not swallowed him up? That, that one would have thought must have destroyed him, was a means to carry him safe to land.

Sometimes, God seems to neglect his children, even when they commit themselves to him; but mark the issue, "He hath made everything beautiful in his time," Eccles. iii. 11. He permits them, it may be, to remain a long time in trouble and danger, to perfect the work of mortification in their hearts, to crucify their confidence in earthly things, to make them more sensible of the evil of sin, and more watchful against it; but wait awhile, and you shall see that the end of his people is peace, Psalm xxxvii. 37. God's presence and assistance to support his children in trouble is invincible—he gives them comfort and gladness when they look not for it. When he seems to neglect their outward man, he gives them a paradise within. God preserves "their feet from falling," and their souls from despair, they have an invisible protection. There was a fence about Job that Satan saw, Job i. 10; and a guard of angels that Elisha saw, 2 Kings vi. 17, and that his servant saw afterwards. The ungodly neither see, nor believe that God sets a guard about his children; as Christ saith, "they have meat the world knows not of," John iv. 32. They feed upon hidden comforts.

Those that commit themselves to God aright, are far from tempting his majesty: God will be trusted, but

not tempted: what though things fall not out according to thy expectation, yet wait thou, and think that God bath further ends, thou canst not see: God will do things in his own way, in the order of his providence, therefore neglect not that. If Christ had cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, what an act would that have been! But He would not so tempt the Almighty. Neither ought we to run unadvisedly into danger, but serve His providence upon all occasions. God uses our endeavours to this very end; He saves not always IMMEDIATELY, but by putting wisdom into our hearts to use lawful means, and using those means, he will save us in them. A christian then, should be in a continual dependance upon God, and say, "I will use these means, God may bless them, if not, I will trust in him. God is not tied to the use of means, though I am." And where there is dependance upon God, there will be an holy silence; all rebellious, stubborn, and tumultuous thoughts are hushed, "My soul is silent unto God," saith David, and "trust in him," Psalm lxii. 1.—**MARGIN.** Christ addressed his disciples with "Fear not little flock, for it is YOUR Father's will to give you the kingdom." As if he had said, "Will not he, that gives you heaven, give you all things? The apostle too, thus writes to the Philippians, chap. iv. 6, "for nothing be careful," that is, in a distracting manner, but "let your requests be made known unto God, and the God of peace shall keep you; and, "therefore were we redeemed from the hands of our enemies, that we might serve him without fear all our days," Luke i. 74, 75. Again, a man that truly trusts God, will commit all his ways unto him. He will take no course, but what he is guided in by the Lord; he looks for wisdom from above, and saith, "Lord, it is not in me to guide my own

way ; but as thy word shall lead me, and the good counsel of thy Spirit in others direct me, so will I follow thee." He, that commits not his ways unto God, will not commit his comforts unto Him. God must be both our counsellor and our comforter. Therefore, the wise man bids us, Acknowledge God in all our ways, and lean not to our own understanding. I beseech you to learn this wholesome lesson, great is our benefit thereby : "He that trusts in the Lord shall be as Mount Sion, that cannot be removed," Psalm cxxv. 1 ; we may be shaken, but cannot be moved. The earth is shaken with earthquakes, but the earth keeps its own centre still : our only peace is in God, and our chiefest safety in his protection. "I was brought low, and he helped me. Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." Is it not a precious thing to have a sweet security of soul, that whether I sleep or wake, whether I be at home or abroad, live or die, I have a Providence watching over me, better than mine own ? When I yield myself up to God, his wisdom is mine, his strength mine, whatsoever he hath it is for me, because I am his ; ought this not to bring down heaven upon earth, that a christian, out of a holy familiarity with God, can resign up his soul to him upon all occasions ? How sweet should a christian's rest be at night after he has yielded himself up to God in prayer !

Beloved, when trouble comes, when sickness comes, when death approaches, what will become of the man that hath no acquaintance with God ? he was a stranger to him in time of prosperity, and God is now a stranger to him in adversity ; therefore, as we desire to die in God's arms, and yield up ourselves to him ; let us daily inure ourselves to this blessed course of committing ourselves and all our ways to him.

“Come and see,” saith the scripture; beloved, if you believe not me, make a trial of this course awhile; did you once taste the sweetness of it, how would your fainting spirits be cheered up!

Oh! if we would be hid in the day of trouble, and have no evil come nigh our dwellings, let us make sure our interest in Christ, and our title to the PROMISE. Seek to know God more, and then you will trust him more; “they that know his name will trust in him,” Psalm ix. 10. O the blessed condition of that christian, whatever his trials may be, that has a throne of grace to flee unto! Improve this privilege, then, come what will, God will be a sanctuary and an abiding place to you. “I will be unto you a little sanctuary,” saith God, in all places, Ezek. xi. 16. What a comfort to have a “wall of fire” compassing us about, Zech. ii. 5—a SHIELD that our enemies must first break through before they can come at us. “He that trusts in God, mercy embraces him on every side,” Psalm xxxii. 10; though he be in the midst of death and hell, or any trouble whatsoever, if he commit himself to God, out of good grounds of faith in his word, he shall be safe in the evil day.

LXX. When we in darkness walk,
Nor feel the heav’ly frame;
Then is the time to trust our God,
And rest upon his name.

Soon shall our doubts and fears
Be hush’d at his control,
His lovingkindness shall break through
The midnight of the soul.

No wonder, when God’s love
Pervades your kindling breast,

You wish for ever to retain
The heart-transporting guest.

Yet learn in ev'ry state,
To make his will your own;
And when the joys of sense depart,
To walk by faith alone.

By anxious fear depress'd,
When from the deep you mourn,
"Lord, why so hasty to depart,
So tedious to return?"

Still on his plighted love,
In all distress rely:
The very hidings of his face,
Shall train thee up to joy.

Wait till the shadows flee;
Wait thine appointed hour:
Wait till the bridegroom of thy soul
Reveal his love with pow'r.

The time of love will come,
When thou shalt clearly see,
Not only that He shed his blood,
But, that it flow'd for thee.

Tarry his leisure then,
Altho' he seem to stay:
A moment's intercourse with Him,
Thy grief will overpay.

Blest is the man, O God,
That stays himself on Thee!
Who waits for thy salvation, Lord,
Shall thy salvation see.

LXXI. The **ENTIRE** resignation of our wills to the disposing will of God, is the indispensable duty of christians, under the sharpest afflictions; as they are sent from the high and just providence of God, it is absolutely necessary there should be an humble feeling of his displeasure: the understanding enlightened by grace, acknowledges the severest dispensations of Providence to be good, that is for reasons, though sometimes unsearchable, yet always righteous; and for gracious ends to God's people. When Hezekiah heard the heavy prophecy, that all his treasures should be carried to Babylon, and his royal progeny become slaves there, he said to Isaiah, "Good is the word of the Lord, which thou hast spoken." His sanctified mind acknowledged it to be a just correction of his vain pride, and quietly submitted to it; and, as there is a satisfaction of mind in the rectitude, so is there in the graciousness of his proceedings. The misapprehension and disbelief of God's design in afflicting, causes impatience and murmuring; but when the mind is convinced that he afflicts us for our benefit; that bodily diseases are medicinal advantages, the remedies of the soul; that the losses of earthly comforts prepare us for divine enjoyments; that the way which is sowed with thorns, and watered with tears, leads to heaven; the heart is compliant with the sharpest methods of Providence. This resignation principally consists in the consent and subjection of the will to the orders of Heaven. The will is an imperious faculty, naturally impatient of opposition to its desires, and we pay the highest honor to God, in the lowest submission of our wills to his appointments. It is true, the will cannot make a direct choice of evil, nor love afflictions; but the Holy Spirit, by a powerful operation, so disposes it, as to renounce its own inclinations when discordant

with the will of God ; and the more humble, ready, and entire the submission is, the more difficult and harsh the denial of our natural desire is, the more supernatural grace shines and is acceptable. It is the perfection of holiness to do what God loves, and to love what God does. There is a rare example of this in David's carriage, when under his greatest affliction : it was in his flight from his son Absalom, who endeavoured to deprive him of his kingdom and life. " And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city : if I shall find favor in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation ; but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee, behold here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him," 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. O happy frame ! his spirit was so equally balanced, that if God would suffer a rebel that violated the most tender and strict relations of a son and subject to a gracious father and sovereign, the murderer of his brother, and a parricide in his desires, to usurp his throne, he humbly submitted to it. The duty of resignation, consists in the composure of the affections to a just measure and temper, when under the sharpest discipline. Of the passions, some are tender, others fierce and stormy, and if an overwhelming evil happen, or the loss of that good that was very pleasing, they sometimes join together as the clouds at the same time dissolve in showers, and break forth in thunder and lightning. Now when sanctified reason hath a due empire over them, and the soul possesses itself in patience, it is a happy effect of resignation to the Divine disposal. Of this, we have an eminent instance in the afflicted saint forementioned. When David was so wickedly reproached by Shimei, and Abishai fired with indignation, would presently have taken exemplary revenge :—

“Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head,” 2 Sam. xvi. 9, 10. How cool and calm was David’s spirit! he felt no tumults within, expressed not outrageous complaint, but said, “Let him curse, because the Lord hath said to him, Curse David.”

There is a twofold excess of the sorrowful affections in troubles.

- First.—In the degrees of them.

Secondly.—In the continuance.

First.—In the degrees of them, when they exceed their causes. Afflictive things that deeply wound us, are usually represented by the reflection of sorrow with all the heightening circumstances—the loss as irretrievable—the evil as intolerable. As objects appear greater than their true proportion when viewed through a mist, so do evils, apprehended through grief; and after such a false judgment, the passions take their violent course, and the spirit sinks under overwhelming oppression. The soul is disabled from performing what belongs to it, with respect to its general and particular calling, and cannot with freedom wait upon God, but neglects its duty and happiness. The first effect of misery is black confusion in the thoughts, that the mind cannot distinctly consider and apply such things as would be effectual to mitigate or remove it. Besides, as when the stream overflows the channel, it runs foul and turbid, so immoderate sorrow often causes secret discontent and anger at the Almighty—disquieting and tormenting risings of heart against his providence. All things are disordered in the soul. And such seeds of excitement exist in our corrupt nature, that in the extremity of anguish, the furious passions swell into a storm, and break the restraints both of reason and of grace. Job thus expostulates strangely with God, “Is it good unto thee that thou

shouldest oppress?" Job x. 3. He was a holy man, and a prophet, who in the paroxysm of his passion, "cursed the day of his birth," Jer. xx. 14.

Secondly.—There is an excess in the continuance. Deep grief doth more arrest the thoughts upon its object than the affection of joy doth. The mind is not so easily diverted from what afflicts, as from what delights. The main strain of the soul, is towards the mournful object; and in the midst of comforts, to support the fainting spirits, there still remains a sad remembrance of that which torments—a swarm of stinging thoughts continually wound and inflame the breast—no counsels prevail, but the soul is resolved in its grief, and always restless with a bitter sense of what is irrecoverable. Thus the prophet describes the misery of Rachel: "weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not," Jer. xxxi. 15. Obstinate sorrow takes occasion from everything it meets with, to increase itself. This consumes the strength, and the mourner lives only to feel his misery, and thinks death too slow for him. Thus, by the fixed contemplation of its trouble, the soul is distracted from its heavenly original, and from pursuing its blessed end, and indulges its sorrow, as if by the loss of a temporal comfort, it was utterly undone. This obstinate grief is inconsistent with a resigned and submissive frame of spirit. Though in great afflictions there will be a conflict of nature, and it is wisdom to let grief breathe forth, and have a passage; yet grace will assuage the fury, and limit the time, by regarding the will of God, and by deriving from the springs of comfort above, some inward refreshings, when the streams below totally fail.

I shall now propound the arguments, that will clearly convince us of this duty of resignation; some of which

are powerful to silence all rebellious thoughts, and suppress all the transports of the passions—others, to raise the drooping spirits, and incline the heart to a calm yielding, and complete subjection to the Divine will.

1. The first argument arises from God's original supreme right in our persons, and all things we possess. He is the fountain of being, and produced us out of the depth of our native nothing, and made us little lower than the angels. He is the author of all our good—the just and true proprietor of all his benefits. From hence result His sovereignty and dominion over us, which is declared in his law, and the dispensations of his providence. His law is the rule of our lives and actions, his governing providence the rule of our sufferings. There is indispensably due, a free and full obedience to His commands, and an entire universal resignation to the orders of his providence. The enjoyment of all our blessings is from His pure goodness and rich bounty, which require our humble and affectionate thankfulness; and his resumption of them should be entertained with a holy and patient submission. He gives them freely, and may recal them at his pleasure. In whatever instance his will is declared, we must with humility and meekness submit; for he hath an equal empire in disposing all things, that are equally his own, and we are bound by an equal obedience to acknowledge his dominion. The mere desire of exemption from his overruling will is a heinous sin; and a stubborn uncompliance with it in the issue of things, is direct rebellion, mixed with ingratitude, obstructive to our present peace, and future happiness. If the afflicted would for a while suspend their tears and sighs, and with free reason consider that, what relation soever they had in their dearest loss, yet God hath a juster claim and a nearer

right in those persons being his, by his best titles of creation and redemption, it would silence murmurings and impatience, and stop the bursts of inordinate sorrow. Add further, that which by immediate connexion follows, the consideration of the glorious majesty of God, and our natural meanness and unworthiness. The distance and disproportion are so vast between Him and us, that we are not able to conceive the full and just idea of his excellent greatness. But who can fully understand the transcendent excellencies of His nature? Who can describe what is ineffable, and most worthy to be adored with silent admiration? "He dwells in that light which is inaccessible;" the angels, the most comprehensive spirits, "veil their faces in the presence of his glory." He is his own original, but without beginning—alone, but not solitary—one ever-blessed God, yet communicates his entire deity to the Son and Spirit. He is not divided in number, nor confused in unity;—He is not compelled by necessity, nor changed by liberty, nor measured by time: if we ascend to the first fountains of all ages, then his infinite understanding comprehended in one clear view, the whole compass, extent, and duration of all things. His powerful word made the visible and invisible world, and upholds them still;—His providence is the band, that unites the parts of the universal commonwealth—the vital spirit and virtue that sustains all: without his eye and hand, his dispositive wisdom and power, the whole frame would fall into confusion and ruin. He is seated upon the throne of the universe. "Thousand thousands of glorious spirits minister unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him," in the quality and humility of his servants, ready to execute his commands. He is the judge of the living and the

dead, that disposeth of heaven and hell for ever. And what is man? A little breathing dust. God is infinitely above us, and so wonderfully condescends, in having a tender care of us, that the Psalmist was swallowed up in ecstacy and amazement at the thoughts of it—"Lord what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou so regardest him?" Nay, we are beneath His anger, as a worm is not worthy of the indignation of an angel. Now the more we magnify God, and exalt his authority in our thoughts, the more our wills are prepared to yield to him: when the Son of God appeared to Saul in his glory, and commanded in person, he presently lets fall his arms of defiance, and says, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" His submission was absolute: nothing was so hard to do, nothing so formidable to suffer, but he was ready to accomplish and endure in obedience to Christ. The more we debase and vilify ourselves, the more easy it will be to bear what God inflicts; humility disposes to submission; the lower esteem we have of ourselves, the less we shall be transported for any breach that is made upon us. We read in the history of Job many heavy complaints uttered by him of his sufferings, and the fruitless efforts of his friends, that did rather exasperate than appease his spirit: and it is very observable that, when the Lord interposed himself to justify the ways of his providence, he did not charge upon him the guilt of his sins, that deserved the severest judgments, but appears in his glory, and reminds him of his original nothing. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding." He opens to him some of the excellencies of the Deity in the works of creation and providence; and the present effect was, Job adored with humble reverence the Divine Majesty,

and acknowledged his own unworthiness: “Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth;—now mine eye seeth thee, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” The thickest smoke by ascending dissipates and vanishes. If the troubled soul did ascend to heaven, and consider that even the worst evils are either from the operation or permission of Divine Providence, the cloudy disturbing thoughts and passions would be presently scattered. When any impatient thoughts arise we should presently chain them up, for there are folly and fury in them;—what am I, that my sullen spirit should dispute against the orders of Heaven; that my passions should resist the will of the highest Lord; that my desires should depose Him from his throne? For thus by implication and consequence they do, who are vexed at His providence. A holy soul will tremble at the thoughts of it. Methinks God speaks to the afflicted and disturbed soul, in the words of the psalm, “Be still, and know that I am God.” The actual consideration of His supremacy will be powerful to lay the growing storm of passions. Impatience arises from the ignorance of God and ourselves.

2. The righteousness of God, in all his ways, if duly considered, will compose the afflicted spirit to quiet and humble submission. He is never unjust to us when he deprives us of our sweetest and most precious comforts, because we have justly incurred the forfeiture of them all. He is not cruel in laying the heaviest punishments upon us, for we deserve them. If we were free from actual sins, yet our depraved nature, so repugnant to the pure law of God, involves us under an obligation to punishment. If we had not been tainted with the guilt of original sin, yet the sins committed in the course of

our lives, make us deeply obnoxious to Divine justice : how much more the concurrent guilt of actual and original sins ! The acts of sin are transient and pass away ; but the guilt and stain of sin, and the conscience of sin remain, and no less than eternal punishment is commensurate to the obliquity. From hence there is the clearest reason to justify God, in all his proceedings. "The throne is established in righteousness." The Psalmist saith, "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains ; thy judgments are a great deep," Psalm xxxvi. 6. The special ends of God, in severe dispensations, are sometimes indiscernible, but never unjust ; his righteousness is obvious to every eye. The actual consideration of this is powerful to silence the uproar of the passions, and to make us lie humbly at his feet, under the sorest chastisements. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord (without a murmur, saith the afflicted church), because I have sinned against him," Micah vii. 9. As disobedience, in our inclination and actions, is a tacit reflection upon the equity of God's law, as if the restraints of it were unreasonable ; so impatience and fretful discontent is upon the equity of his providence, as if the afflictive dispensations of it were not due to us ; and the sense of our sinfulness and of God's righteousness, is an excellent preventive of it. If thou be in great afflictions, and feel any tumultuous thoughts—any rebellious risings within thee, consider thou art a sinner guilty of ten thousand provocations ; and darest thou appear before his enlightened and dread tribunal, and—challenge him for any unrighteous proceedings ? "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins ?" Lam. iii. 39. Our deserts are less than the least of God's mercies, and our offences greater than the greatest of his judgments. This should make us

not only patiently submit, but humbly accept the punishment of our iniquity; as far less than what we have deserved, Lev. xxvi. 41. If the sentence of death against a malefactor be exchanged for banishment, or banishment be remitted for a short confinement, is there not incomparably more cause to be thankful for what is pardoned, than to complain for what is suffered? What ingratitude is it to be impatient and murmuring for these temporary afflictions, when we deserve an eternal and insupportable weight of misery in hell! It is infinitely more becoming us, and safe, to condemn our irregular passions, than to tax God's righteous dispensations.

3. God's power is immense and uncontrollable, and it is a vain attempt to contend with him, as if the eternal order of his decrees could be altered or broken. The contest between God and the sinner is, whose will shall stand. It is His glorious work to depress the proud, and subdue the refractory spirits. The punishment of the first pride in the angels is an eternal and terrible example of his powerful justice; and how intolerable a crime it is, which heaven could not bear, but presently opened, and the guilty fell into the bottomless pit. Now pride is a seminal evil, and lies at the root of stubbornness, and impatience under judgments. Proud dust is apt to fly in God's face upon every motion of the afflicting passions. And by the resistance of self-will, he is provoked to more severity. "Woe unto him that striveth with his maker!" Isaiah xlvi. 9. This is to be like the restive horse or mule, without understanding, that flings and foams when the burden is laid upon him, but gets nothing but blows, without the removal of his burden. It is our duty and interest to observe the apostle's direction: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time," 1 Peter

v. 6. There is a passive humbling by His irresistible providence, and an active voluntary humbling, which implies a subjection to his law, and a submission to his will: this is infinitely pleasing to him, it is the right disposition that prepares us for mercy, and is the certain way of exaltation, for then God obtains his end. The humble prostrating ourselves at his feet to receive his correction, causes his bowels to relent, and stops his hand: the seeming humiliation of Ahab procured a respite of those fearful judgments denounced against his house. "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much more be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?" Heb. xii. 9. Unsubmission induces a deadly guilt upon the rebellious.

4. His paternal care in sending afflictions, is a sufficient argument to win our compliance with his will. The blessed apostle applying lenitives to the afflicted, propounds two divine truths, which if seriously thought of, and stedfastly believed, are powerful to mitigate the bitterness of all sufferings, and support the spirit under the greatest agony. The first is, "God scourgeth every son, whom he receiveth," Heb. xii. 6; and the other that is joined with it is, "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth."

The rule is general :—

(i.) All his sons are under the discipline of the rod; and who would be so unhappy as to be exempted from that number, for all the prosperity of the world? Afflictions, sanctified, are the conspicuous seal of adoption; and who would forfeit the honor of that adoption, and lose the benefit annexed to it—the eternal inheritance, rather than patiently bear his fatherly chastisements? Others that enjoy a perpetual spring of pleasure here,

are declared in scripture to be bastards, and not sons, Heb. xii. 8. They are, indeed, within the compass of his universal providence, but not of that peculiar care that belongs to his sacred and select progeny. His corrections are a proof of his authority as our Father, and an assurance that we are his children : this should induce us not only with submissive temper of soul, but with thankfulness to receive the sharpest correction from the hands of our heavenly Father. This was the reason of our Saviour's meek yielding himself to the violence and cruelty of his enemies.

(ii.) Chastisement is the effect of His paternal love. He is the Father of our spirits, and that divine relation carries with it a special love to the spirits of men, and in that degree of eminence, as to secure and advance their happiness, though to the destruction of the flesh. The soul is of incomparably more worth than the body, as the bright orient pearl than the mean shell that contains it : this, God most highly values ; for this he gave so great a price, and on it draws his image. If temporal prosperity were for our best advantage, how willingly would God bestow it on us ? He that gives grace and glory, the most real testimonies of his love, certainly withholds no good thing from his people. I shall produce one convincing instance of this :—St. Paul, who by an incomparable privilege was rapt up to the celestial paradise, and heard ineffable things, yet was tormented by the messenger of Satan, and his earnest repeated prayer for deliverance not presently granted. Did God not love that blessed apostle, whose internal love to Christ almost equalled the seraphims, and was expressed in the invariable tenor of his life, by such miraculous actions and sufferings for the propagating and defence of the faith of Christ, and the glory of his name ? If “ we

love him, because he first loved us," as St. John testifies, certainly, he that returned such superlative love to Christ, received the greatest love from him. Now, if Christ did love Paul, why did he not, upon his repeated, earnest prayer, deliver him from his wounding trouble, whatever it was? That permission was a demonstration of the love of Christ to him, as it is acknowledged by himself: "lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me," 2 Cor. xii. 7. That the afflictions of the saints proceed from God's love, will be evident, by considering—

First, God's gracious design in sending them. God doth not afflict willingly, but if need be; not for his own pleasure, "but for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness," Heb. xiii. 10. The expression is emphatical, "his holiness," the brightest glory of his nature—the divinest gift of his love. The two principal parts of holiness are ceasing from doing evil and learning to do well; and afflictions are ordained and sent as profitable for both these effects; for the cure and prevention of sin, which is an evil incomparably worse in its nature, and terrible consequences, in this and the next world, than all the mere afflicting temporal evils. Sin defiles and debases the soul, which is the proper excellency of man, and separates from God our supreme good. "Your sins have separated between you and your God, and have hid his face from you." All afflictions that can befall us here in our persons or concerns, the most disgraceful accidents, the most reproachful contumelious slanders, the most loathsome contagious diseases, that cause our dearest friends to withdraw from us, yet cannot deprive us of union with God by faith and love, nor of the enjoy-

ment of his propitious presence : but sin hath this pernicious effect, it separates from his gracious presence here, and, if continued in without repentance, will exclude from his glorious presence for ever. Now afflictions are medicinal preparations for the cure of sin, the disease and the death of the soul, and therefore infinitely worse than the sharpest remedies. Besides, the intention of God is by affliction to exercise his people's graces. The most excellent christian virtues would be comparatively of little use without hard trials. Unfeigned faith in the truth and power of God to accomplish his promises in Christ Jesus, sincere love to him, humble self-denial, persevering patience then appear in their strength and vigour. What a blessed advantage is it by the loss of temporal comforts to increase in the graces of the Spirit ! They are the truest riches, the fullest joy, and the highest honor of the christian. St. Peter declares " that the trial of our faith is much more precious than of gold that perisheth," 1 Pet. i. 7 ; it is refined and purified by the fire of affliction, and " will be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." It is the advice of St. James, " Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (trials) ; knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience," James i. 2, 3. Though afflictions, simply considered, may be very grievous, yet if we advisedly weigh, and rightly compare things, even when our sorrowful passions are moved, our judgments will esteem them matter of joy, not only in expectation of future happiness, but as Divine grace is thereby drawn forth in the most noble operations. In short, the ultimate design of God in afflicting his people is thereby to bring them to heaven. Affliction mortifies the lusts of the flesh, purifies the spirit, " and makes us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." By persevering patience in sufferings,

they are approved of God, and obtain a right and title to the kingdom of glory : for, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, heaven shall be conferred as a reward to those that overcome, Rev. xxi. 7. If there be no enemy, there will be no fight ; and if no fight, no victory ; if no victory, no triumph ; only those who conquer are crowned.

Secondly, God's love is discovered in his compassionate providence over them, and assisting power afforded to them in their afflictions. He speaks to the afflicted and disconsolate, " My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him," Heb. xii. 5 ; to sweeten by that tender expression the rigour of his discipline ; to signify his dear sympathy with their anguish and sufferings.

Heavenly consolation ! God himself bears a share in their sorrows, and the effect of this love is that, he always tempers and moderates their trials to their strength, or increases their strength in proportion to the trial. His corrections are deliberate dispensations, that proceed from judgment, not from fury, which the prophet earnestly deprecates, Jer. x. 24. His rods are bound up with mercy ; his faithfulness joins with his affection in moderating their sufferings. Our Redeemer in his agony was relieved by succour from heaven, the presence of an angel with a message of comfort. St. Paul found it verified in his own experience, " that as the sufferings of Christ abounded in him, so his consolations abounded by Christ," 2 Cor. i. 5 ; and xii. 9 ; and the Divine power was accomplished, as illustriously appeared in supporting his weakness. How many have enjoyed comforts of a more precious nature, and more abundant, in want of supplies from the world, than in the possession of them ! When there is a total eclipse below, the blessed Comforter

descends with light, and fills the soul with joy in believing.

Lastly,—The issue out of all is the most sensible declaration of God's love to them. The continuance is limited by His tender love till they are prepared for mercy. The prosperity of the wicked is wine in the beginning, and lees at the bottom; but the worst and most afflicted state of the saints is first, and will at length certainly end in peace and happiness. In the tragedy of Job, the Devil was the author, Chaldeans and Sabeans were the actors, “but the end was from the Lord.” Christians, who with unfainting perseverance in their duty suffer affliction, shall be rewarded with holiness in conjunction with peace. This peaceable fruit of righteousness is not the natural product of affliction; grapes do not spring from thorns, nor figs from thistles; neither can it be so properly ascribed to the afflicted person, as to the powerful virtue, and special grace of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies afflictions, and makes them profitable for effecting God's intention by them. And when the afflicted person becomes more humble, more holy, more weaned from the world, more resigned to the will of God, this “fruit unto holiness,” will compensate all his pains and sorrows. And, in conjunction with holiness, there will be a divine peace—a joyful calm and quietness in the sense of God's pardon and reconciliation: his answers of peace are usually a reward, according to the operations of grace—his comforts are dispensed as encouragements to obedience. Besides, when the sinful corruptions are purged out, which caused perpetual disturbance, and our affections and actions are correspondent to the Divine law, there is that clearness and serenity of mind—that rest and ease in the soul, arising from its just and due subordination to God, which the disobedient, in

all their seeming prosperity, never enjoy. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." These beginnings of happiness are obtained here, but the perfection of it is only in the next life. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him," James i. 12. The richness and value of the "crown of life," is so great, that God, the most wise and just esteemer of things, gave the precious blood of his Son to purchase it for us. It is a happiness so transcendent in its quality —so stable in its duration, that the blessed God cannot give us a greater; for what greater good is conceivable than Himself? And what more stable enjoyment of it than eternity? The hope of this makes a christian blessed in the midst of the greatest miseries.

LXXII. O Lord, my best desire fulfil,
 And help me to resign,
 Life, health, and comfort to thy will,
 And make thy pleasure mine.

Why should I shrink at thy command,
 Whose love forbids my fears?
 Or tremble at the gracious hand,
 That wipes away my tears?

No: let me rather freely yield
 What most I prize, to Thee;
 Who never hast a good withheld,
 Or wilt withhold from me.

Thy favor, all my journey through,
 Thou art engag'd to grant;
 What else I want, or think I do,
 'Tis better still to want.

Wisdom and mercy guide my way,
Shall I resist them both?
A poor blind creature of a day,
And crush'd before the moth!

“But ah!” my inward spirit cries,
“Still bind me to thy sway;
Else the next cloud that veils my skies,
Drives all these thoughts away.”

LXXIII. God hath chosen another way of expressing his love to his people, than by outward prosperity: for he will govern the spiritual part of the world by faith, and not by sense: therefore “no man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before them,” Eccles. ix. 1, that is, by mere outward events, or things obvious to outward sense: the marks of his love are more hidden Prov. iii. 32. Solomon here supposes that the oppressor may be in a flourishing condition, yet all the while the Lord hates him; “his secret is with the righteous:” we know his fatherly love to us, not by things without us, but by things within us, Rom. viii. 16. “Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us,” 1 John iii. 24. “He hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,” Gal. iv. 6. Outward things would be soon overvalued, and we should take them as our whole happiness and portion; if, besides their suitableness to our present needs and appetites, they should come to us as special evidences of God’s love. Afflictions are necessary to the best of christians. Certain it is, God will conduct his people to glory, not only by his internal, but external providences. To humble us, and to wean us from the world, there is need of afflictions. We are wanton, vain, neglectful of God, unmindful of heavenly things; if God did not put

us under the discipline of the cross, our minds and hearts would be more alienated from God and heavenly things. "Before I was afflicted I went astray," Psalm cxix. 67. Now, since the best need it, God will not be wanting in any part or point of necessary government to them: that they may know the worth and benefit of God's word, and that the comfort of it may be seen and felt by experience, how able it is to support us, and to uphold a heart sinking under any trouble whatsoever, Rom. xv. 4. In full prosperity, when we seem to live upon the creature, we know not the benefit of God's promise, nor how to live by faith: the word of God provides comfort to the seekers, not only at the end of the journey, but for their support at present, while they are in the way. These comforts would be useless if never put upon the trial, therefore none of God's children must look to be exempted. "The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world," 1 Peter v. 9. Our condition is no harder than the rest of God's children, that have passed through the world. Christians are often ready to sink under their burden, they think they shall perish when they look to the bare afflictions. This may come from the grievousness of the affliction, which staggers and amazes them. "Thou hast showed thy people hard things, thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment," Psalm lx. 3. Their thoughts are confounded, as a man that has taken a poisonous potion. They know not to what hand to turn—are wholly cast down, and put out of all comfort. It comes too from their weakness. There is some weakness in the most advanced christians, more than they are aware of. We are like Peter, we think we can walk on the sea, but some boisterous wind or other assaults our confidence, and then we cry out, "Lord, save me,"

Matt. xiv. 30; and so our weakness is made evident by proof:—whence cometh this weakness?

1. Partly, because we look more to the creature than to God; and to the danger, than to the power that is to carry us through it. “I, even I am he that comforteth thee: who art thou that shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the Son of man that shall be made as grass? And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy; and where is the fury of the oppressor?” We that have the immortal and almighty God to be our protector and Saviour, why should we be afraid of a frail mortal man?

2. If they look to God, yet God doth not seem to look to them. If a thin curtain be drawn between God and us, we are presently dismayed, as if he were wholly gone; and because of our sufferings, we question the love of God. “Hath God forgotten to be gracious, hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” Psalm lxxvii. 9. “Zion hath said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me,” Isaiah xl ix. 14. Though our condition be every way consistent with the fatherly love of God. “Ye have forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto you as unto children.” We are children, though under discipline; and God is a father, though he frowneth as well as smileth.

3. Impatience of delay: if we question not his love, yet cannot we tarry his leisure. Certainly it is very meet we should wait God’s leisure;—though he seem asleep, he will awake for our help. But the people of God have not always the strength of faith, and therefore faint, and think themselves ready to perish: “I said in my haste, I am cut off,” Psalm xxxi. 22.

4. Christianity itself entenders the heart ; a Father's anger is no slight thing to a gracious soul. When we are afflicted and God is angry, the trouble is more grievous, and it is hard to steer between the two rocks of slighting and fainting ; well then, pity poor creatures under the burden, help them, but censure them not. The true matter of comfort to be sought after is pardon and reconciliation with God, through his Son, Rom. v. 10. There is no solid cause for rejoicing till then ; when reconciled to God by the blood of his Son, then true peace, peace that passeth all understanding, will guard both heart and mind, Phil. iv. 7. Then all miseries are unstinged, the intrinsic evil of afflictions is taken away. While sin remains unpardoned, the thorn still remains in the sore. There is a crown set against the cross to those that are reconciled ;—heavenly comforts against earthly afflictions : the afflictions of God's children are comparatively light and short. Nothing should be grievous to them that know a world to come, where all tears shall be wiped from their eyes, and they shall enjoy fulness of joy and pleasure for evermore. “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous, and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.” To all Christ's sincere, faithful and obedient servants, these promises are matter of abundant joy. As to particular comforts under affliction, it is endless to instance all, but take a few instances.

The word of God teaches us not only how to bear them, but how to improve them ; as it teaches us how to bear them, it breeds quietness and submission ; but as it teaches us how to improve them, it breeds peace and joy. This fruit is better than deliverance, as we get spiritual advantage by it ; as it promotes repentance, purges out sin, and brings us home to God. It rids us

of the cause of our trouble, and brings us to the centre of our rest.

The word also teaches us to depend on God for moderating our afflictions, and for deliverance from them, 1 Cor. x. 13. Often before He gives a passage out of our pressures, He vouchsafes present support to us, and will not permit his servants to be tried beyond their strength. Under the cross too God gives his people most experience of himself; they have more peculiar support under suffering than for ordinary services; Paul was most strong when weak, 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10; the greater the pressures, the more sensible the Divine assistance; and when ordinary means fail, and God's children are pressed above their own strength, the more visible is the proof of God's help; when they are most apt to suspect God's love, they have had the highest manifestations of it—most of God's smiles, when all earthly things seem to frown upon them—in short, have had more understanding not only of God's word, but of his love. If God governs all things for the benefit of his people, surely then afflictions; and they submitting, and being exercised under sharp dispensations, may find it verified to them. Many things seem to tend to our hurt,—many think themselves utterly undone,—but God knows how to bring good out of apparent evil.

This should lead us to consider how much we are to blame, who, professing ourselves to be christians, do so little honor our profession by patience and submission under troubles. Wherefore were the great mysteries of godliness made known to us, and the promises of the world to come, and all the directions concerning the subjection of the soul to God, and those blessed privileges we enjoy by Christ, if they all are not able to satisfy and stay your heart, and compose it to a quiet

submission to God's will, when it is his pleasure to take away all comfort from you? Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Will not the whole word of God yield you a cordial or a cure? It is a disparagement to the provision Christ hath made for our comfort. In refusing this provision, you indulge a distemper, and the obstinacy and peevishness of grief. Certainly you do not expostulate with yourselves, and cite your passions before the tribunal of the gospel, Psalm xlii. 5; or else you look altogether at the grievance and reject the comfort—aggravate the grievance—extenuate the comfort; you seek too much temporal happiness, would have God comply with your own desires, and are not "content with such things as you have." A christian must be purged from such inordinate affection when he would trust in God.

David's comfort in trouble may be seen. "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction," Psalm cxix. 92. Imitate his example—prize the scriptures more—be more diligent in hearing, reading, meditating on the blessed truths of the gospel. The earth is the fruitful mother of all herbs and plants, yet it must be tilled, ploughed, harrowed, and dressed, else it bringeth forth little fruit. The scriptures contain all the grounds of comfort and happiness we need, but we have little benefit from them unless daily versed in reading, hearing, and meditation; surely if we prize them as we ought, we would do so. "O how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day," Psalm cxix. 97. There we find the only remedy for sin and misery—the offer of true blessedness—the sure rule to walk by.

When afflictions come upon you, consider what is your greatest burden, and what is your greatest comfort,

for then you are best at leisure to consider both ; your greatest burden, that you may avoid it, your greatest comfort, that you may apply yourselves to it.

LXXIV. Rejoice, believer, in the Lord,
Who makes your cause his own ;
The hope, that's built upon his word,
Can ne'er be overthrown.

Though many foes beset your road,
And feeble is your arm ;
Your life is hid with Christ in God, (Col. iii. 2),
Beyond the reach of harm.

Weak as you are, you shall not faint,
Or fainting, shall not die ;
Jesus, the strength of ev'ry saint,
Shall aid you from on high (Isaiah xl. 29).

Though sometimes unperceiv'd by sense,
Faith sees Him always near,
A guide, a glory, a defence,
Then what have you to fear ?

As surely as He overcame,
And triumph'd once for you,
So surely you, that love his name,
Shall triumph in Him too.

LXXV. The belief of the certainty of all events, from an eternal purpose of God, may be of great use for the quiet, stay, support, and comfort of christians under the sad contingencies of this changing life, whether caused by the immediate hand of God, or from the malice and wickedness of men. There is nothing which cometh to pass but there first passed upon it the counsel of the

Divine will : then a working of Divine Providence either effecting or permitting it, immediately influencing the agent, if for good—or permitting the oblique motions of man's will to it and in it, his lusts and passions in their disorder, if the thing be evil. We are creatures who are full of passions, exceedingly subject to excess and the overboilings of them. In reference to evil, that is things that are not pleasing to our external senses, there are two or three passions which give us most if not all the trouble of our lives : **FEAR**, that torments us upon the prospect of some great evil, probable, or likely to fall upon us ;—**GRIEF**, that drowns us, upon the overflowing of some Divine scourge upon our own persons, families, or interests in the world ;—**ANGER**, that corrodes and consumes us, because we cannot be revenged upon such as have been instruments of any evil to us.

In the workings of all these our corrupt nature is very prone to excess. Now under all accidents, apt to elicit, irritate, or inflame these passions, and thus to disorder and to spoil the quiet and composure of our minds, it should mightily stay us, that nothing is casual or contingent with God ; nothing comes to pass in time but what He hath from all eternity determined, and set in order : man hath done, and can do no more than what God hath purposed, nor suffer more than what He hath fixed by the eternal counsel of His will. There are two necessary consequents of this eternal predestination, which, if duly weighed, will wonderfully relieve and stay the hearts of God's people under the troubles and contingencies of this life.

1. That although the will and counsel of God puts no force upon rational agents, nor offers any violence to human will, yet it lays a necessity upon the event. This is what a generation in the world will not under-

stand, but nothing can be plainer to any, who have ears to hear, or a mind to understand. God's counsel predetermined the death of Jesus Christ—the scripture plainly saith, that Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the Jews, did no more than what the counsel of God had determined to be done, Acts iv. 28. I would fain ask now, whether, as to the event, it had been possible that Pontius Pilate should not have condemned, or the Jews should not have crucified Christ: “for who hath resisted his will?” Rom. ix. 19. Yet will any say, but as to the action, Judas was forced to betray him, or Pilate to condemn him; they acted voluntarily as to their action, although the event was necessary. God's counsel influenced the event, but not their wills to move them to the action. But, I say, the necessity of the event, though it doth not justify the agent, nor authorize the act, yet it is of wonderful use to satisfy such as suffer under such events; as it lets us know that all our trouble, all our fears, griefs, anxieties, suspicions, jealousies, and condemning of ourselves for any omissions, or neglects of means are vain, and to no purpose; the thing must or will be, it must or would have been, God had determined it, there was an eternal counsel had passed upon it. We are very prone upon sad events to torture ourselves with such reflections as these: “If this or that thing had not been done, if this or that means had not been used, this thing had not happened—such a friend had not died—such mischief had not befallen me.” “Lord,” said Martha, “if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died,” John xi. 21. We are wonderfully mistaken in these things: it is true, that our knowledge, that events are certain, is no justification of us in the neglect of the use of any means in order to the obtaining any good we desire, or preventing or removing

any evil upon us, or hanging over us ; and the reason is plain, because, though the event be certain, yet we are not assured of it : and because that God, who hath willed us any good or the preventing or removing any evil, hath willed both the one and the other, to be obtained in the use of such means, as either in a natural way of working, or upon the evidence of reason, or direction of scripture, appear proper. And further, it is the command of God we should use means. But, supposing no means neglected, the predetermination of God ought to satisfy us, though we miss some good, which we passionately desired, or suffer under the pressure of some evil from which we earnestly sought deliverance, and used all means in our power to be freed from ; it should also quiet us as to any fears that are immoderate, and distract our minds concerning any evil likely to befall us, when we have it in prospect, and see it hanging over our heads. It may also be of use to still our spirits concerning means less successfully, and even ineffectually used to prevent such evils ; yet, for the reasons I before mentioned, we must take heed of thinking that this certainty of the event from the Divine prescience and will, gives us anything of a supersedeas as to the use of any proper means which we are equally obliged to use, as if the event had been uncertain and casual, and might as well not have been as been.

2. But there is more yet in this opinion to satisfy every real christian—for if all events, how unpalatable soever to us, are according to the eternal purpose of God, and the counsel of the Divine will. They necessarily must be good—the products of infinite wisdom, and of infinite love and goodness to such as love and fear God.—I say they necessarily must be good. I say this of such as God hath willed to effect, not of such events

as God hath only willed to permit. Of the first sort are all evils of punishment. It is not beneath God to be the author of his own judgments: evils of affliction are only nominally evil, and called so according to the language and apprehension of our senses,—they must needs be the products of infinite wisdom. It is true of God's counsels that in infinite wisdom hath He established them all; so, as all events are fixed in the best order imaginable for the glorifying of God—which is the highest end any action can be directed to, it is the highest end which God could act for, and that to which, as we ought to direct all our actions, so we ought also to submit all our passions. The sum of all our prayers is, or should be, “Let the Lord be glorified.” If God be glorified, every christian hath his real wish, his utmost design, and desire. Now if all events were from eternity set in order and predetermined by the counsel of the Divine will, they must be ordered to the glory of God, because they are ordered by and in infinite wisdom, which always directeth the best means in order to the best end. God could not be deceived in his contrivance, and proportioning of means, in order to his own ends; although, therefore, we may, and ought to mourn and be afflicted for many things which we see done under the sun, because they are brought to pass by the lusts, malice, and wickedness of men—by their sinful corruptions and passions, by which God is highly dishonored—and, it may be, we cannot understand what honor God can have from the event itself, yet we ought at last to recollect ourselves, and get victory over our passions, and to say, “Whatever happens is permitted by Him, who is infinitely wise in counsel, who can do nothing but in subserviency to the great end of his actions, the glory of his own great name:” “For this cause have I raised thee up,”

says God, to Pharaoh. Every real christian, therefore, ought to satisfy himself as to what he seeth before him in the world, and to say, "Let come what will of me and mine, though I am frustrated of my expectations and desires; I thought God might have been more glorified my way, I see I was mistaken." God cannot be frustrated of his ends, nor be deceived as to means proper for the compassing them. This thing came not to pass without the eternal counsel of the Divine will. God is true to his own end; he would never have decreed to have permitted it, nor have permitted it actually, if he had not known how to have compassed his own glory by, and from it, when done: "surely the wrath of man shall praise Him." I cannot see the wisdom of God in it, but there is an infinite wisdom in it; and when the Lord's work is finished, I shall then see it, and be able to understand what I do not now. I cannot expect to fathom the depths of Divine wisdom.

3. But this is not all: supposing that all events and contingencies must, to those who love and fear God, be not only the products of infinite wisdom with respect to God's glory, which is the highest end, but with respect also to their own good, and this not only in regard of the promise, "All things are yours," "and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's," but also of his fatherly relation to them, 2 Cor. vi. 18. God too hath said concerning them, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," Jer. xxxi. 3; and having done so, all his eternal counsels, all the motions of his providence, must be ordered to the demonstration of it—and this every child of God shall see first or last. Many of us looking upon God's works, before they are finished, pass a wrong judgment upon them; but could we only see the whole scope of them in the eternal counsel of the Divine will, or wait

with patience till God have finished his work, we should then apprehend the beauty of it, and know how agreeable it is to the glory, wisdom, mercy, truth and goodness of God, which it is intended to demonstrate to the world; and it is only our weakness and imperfection that prevents our seeing it before. The malice of men in the persecutions of God's people, looketh upon us with an horrid aspect; this indeed God doth not effect, but he hath willed it should be, and hath told us, it must come to pass, yea, and he worketh too, in permitting others to bring it about, and permitting them in the execution of their malice, whom he could easily hinder: but when these things are over, we often see both infinite wisdom and goodness too in them. How could the salvation of a lost world have been accomplished, if God had not permitted Judas to betray his Master—Pilate to condemn Him—and the Jews to nail Him to the cross? Had it not been for the persecution of the Jews, how could the gospel have gone to the Gentiles? And it will be profitable to us to contemplate this great truth frequently. It should stir us up to many acts of duty.

(i.) We should be deeply affected with the sad providences which God measures out to his church and people. What saith the Psalmist? “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.” The sad rebukes of God’s providence should be laid to heart. Though persecutions and afflictions be contrivances of infinite wisdom, and products of certain and infinite love; yet, to the present sufferers, they may be punishments of sin, and marks of Divine displeasure; and therefore ought not to pass over our heads, without our taking notice of them, and causing some sad thoughts within us: the crucifying of Christ, was

the product of infinite wisdom and goodness to God's people, but yet a just cause of fear and sadness to the disciples of Christ. We must take things as they appear to us, not being able to fathom God's designs. That they shall at last issue in the glory of God, and the good of his children, is indeed matter of faith, and will be matter of joy to us, when we see it; but in the mean time, it is matter of sadness to us, to see God's vineyard rooted up—his people eaten like bread, Psalm xiv. 4—and "the wicked devouring the man that is more righteous than he," Hab. i. 13.

(ii.) Again, we have reason to be afflicted for our own sins, and the sins of others. Although it be, as to the event, true, that both our own and others' sins shall issue in God's glory, Rom. ix. 17; yet, it is as true, that God hath no need either of our or any others' lies for his glory, and that God is, both by our sins and the sins of others, greatly dishonored. That they should be made to issue in God's glory, is the work of God's wisdom, not of our oblique and irregular actions or intentions, and therefore they ought to be causes of sad reflection to us. But thus far we may satisfy ourselves, that the event was necessary, and nothing that hath come to pass, could, with our utmost care and diligence, have been otherwise than it is. We may talk after the manner of men, and reason after the measure of human probabilities, "if such a thing had not been, another had not followed;" but there is nothing issued in time, but was ordered in eternity. We ought also in this to be satisfied, "that of whatsoever the Lord hath promised, nothing shall fail." We are full of unbelief, and when we see God's providence working, as we judge, directly contrary to what he hath promised, we presently give up all for lost; but if everything be wrought according

to the counsel of the Divine will, and the holy scriptures be such a part of this will, as he hath pleased to reveal to us, God knoweth both what he hath said, and how he hath laid things in his eternal thoughts, and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than any word he hath spoken: "The counsel of the Lord that shall stand," Prov. xix. 21; and, "the word of our God shall stand for ever," Isaiah xl. 8.

(iii.) Lastly,—we may be satisfied, that whatever doth, or ever shall come to pass in the world, shall serve God's great ends; because it is ordered by God, and, therefore, must necessarily serve his designs. In the end of the world we shall say, God could not have had so much glory, but for such a persecution, for such a disorder: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee," Psalm lxxvi. 10.

LXXVI. Thy ways, O Lord, with wise design,
Are fram'd upon thy throne above,
And every dark and crooked line,
Meets in the centre of thy love.

With feeble light, and half obscure,
Poor mortals thine arrangements view;
Not knowing that the least are sure,
And the mysterious just and true.

Thy flock, thine own peculiar care,
Tho' now they seem to roam uney'd,
Are led or driven only where
They best and safest may abide.

They neither know, nor trace the way,
But, trusting to thy piercing eye,
None of their feet to ruin stray,
Nor shall the weakest fail or die.

My favor'd soul shall meekly learn,
To lay her reason at thy throne;
Too weak thy secrets to discern,
I'll trust thee for my guide alone.

LXXVII. Every grace that brings a christian to heaven must be tried—his patience, his contentment, his humility. How shall these graces be tried, but in a variety of states and conditions? And how shall we have experience of the goodness of God, but in a variety of states? When we find the stable, certain, constant love of God in a variety of conditions, that howsoever they ebb or flow, are up or down, sometimes fair and sometimes foul, like spring weather; yet, notwithstanding, the love of God is constant always, and we have never so sure experience of it as in the variety of conditions that befall us; when we know that in God there is no shadow of changing, whatever the changes of our life be; is it not a point worth our learning to know the truth of our grace, and the constancy of God's love with whom we are in gracious covenant? This wisdom is gotten by experience in variety of estates: he that is carried on in one condition, hath no wisdom to judge of another's state, or how to carry himself towards a christian in another condition, because he was never abased himself. He despises him, as the Pharisee did the publican, Luke xviii. 11; he knows not how to tender another, that hath not been in another's condition. And therefore, that we may carry ourselves as christians, meekly, lovingly, and tenderly to others, God will have us go to heaven in a variety—not in one uniform condition in regard of outward things.

Learn hence, not to quarrel with God's government, for although he alters our conditions, yet he never alters his love. A christian is immovable in regard to the

favor of God towards him—in all moveable conditions, he hath a fixed condition; therefore, let us not presume to find fault with God's dispensations, but let him do as he please. So He bring us to heaven at last, it is no matter what way; how rugged soever and rough it be, however beset with thorns and briars, so he bring us thither at last. This teaches God's children to know how to abound and how to be abased, as they ought to do. For there is no state but a christian may gather good matter out of it, as the bee gathers honey from every flower. A christian can practise the graces that ought and may be practised in all conditions. For instance, he can abound in expressing thankfulness to God: he hath a spirit to be a faithful steward, in abundance—a spirit to honor God with that abundance, knowing that all is grass, "which withereth afore it groweth up," Psalm cxxix. 6: he can be humble: he can bend under the mighty hand of God: he can acknowledge and confess in his abasement the vanity of worldly favor and worldly greatness—he learns what it is. And so in the same way he can learn to exercise patience and all other graces, that are to be practised in a mean estate. Grace rises above all conditions—can manage and rule all estates of life, and make them serviceable to its own ends. A gracious man is not dejected overmuch with abasement; he is not lifted up overmuch with abundance, but he carries himself in an even manner, becoming a christian in all conditions. For abundance works upon the soul of man; he had need to have strong grace, that digests abundance. See how it wrought upon David and Solomon, they were better in adversity; and yet the child of God hath grace even to overcome the sins that are incident to abundance; he has grace to be lowly minded in a great estate, "not to trust in uncertain

riches," 1 Tim. vi. 17; he knows by the Spirit of God what they are, and that he hath an inheritance of better things in another world—which teaches him to set a light esteem upon all things below. And so for dejection, the sin we are so subject to fall into in want, and putting forth our hands to evil means to shift the trouble that is on us. God's child can learn to want without tainting his conscience with ill courses, and he can want without impatience, without too much dejection of spirit, as if all were lost; when indeed, as a christian, he is in a manner rich all alike, for God is his portion, and howsoever a beam may be taken away, the sun is his; take away the stream, the fountain is his; in the poorest estate, God all-sufficient, Gen. xvii. 1, is his still: God never takes away himself. The christian knows this, and therefore he can want, as long as he hath the spring of all, without murmuring—without dejection of spirit. Whereas, those who have not been brought up in Christ's school, nor trained up in a variety of conditions, are able to do nothing; if they abound, they are proud; if they be cast down, they fret, as if there was no Providence to rule the world, as if they were fatherless children. But as a christian knows what it is to abound by experience, so he knows how to abound with practice of the graces, and how to want with the avoiding the snares that usually attend that condition. True, he learns it not very easily, nor very soon. Self-denial is the first lesson in Christ's school; having no wisdom of his own, but looking unto Christ; and to have no will of his own, further than his commandments guide us: and he that has learned self-denial, is in the right way to learn the blessed lesson of contentment in any condition whatsoever: but there are many things to be learned, before we can

come to carry ourselves wisely in any condition. For besides self-denial, we must learn the doctrine of the covenant of grace. That God in Christ is become a Father to us, and carries a fatherly mind towards us, in what condition soever we are, he is a Father still, and intends us well, and will provide for us in the hardest condition : having taken the relation of a Father upon him, do you think he will fail in the carriage of a father towards us?" "He is very pitiful, and of tender mercy," James v. 11, he has respect to us in the basest condition ; he, that knows God to be his Father, cast him into what condition you will, knows he hath a good portion.

When grace comes, it takes out the sting of all ill, and then we find good in the worst estate. There is a vanity in the best things, and there is a good in the worst ; grace gathers out the good ; as God turns all to good, so grace discovers good in every condition. The Spirit of God sanctifies a christian to all conditions, and sanctifies every condition to him. What a blessed thing is it to be in the covenant of grace—to have God for our Father—to be in Christ—that let our outward condition be what it may, we shall have grace to carry ourselves in it : God will go along with us by his Holy Spirit ! What a blessed thing is it, in all the uncertainties of the world, to have a certain rule to go by—none but a christian hath this. "I have learned," saith St. Paul, "in *whatsoever state* I am, therewith to be content," Phil. iv. 11. When did he learn it?—not before he was a christian. This proves the state of a christian to be above all others : a christian is not at the mercy of the world, his contentment is not a dependant contentment. You may cast him into prison, you may impoverish him, you may labor to debase and disgrace

him ;—but can you take away his faith? Can you take away his grace? Can you take away the love of God? No, God will rather increase all upon him; for the best things of a christian are not at the mercy of the world, nor at the mercy of his several conditions. Prosperity and adversity, these are out of him: he hath a state depending upon the good will of his heavenly Father, who loves him better than he loves himself: and out of love will work good out of the worst condition that can befall him. For whosoever hath the Spirit of Christ is enabled to do all things, he can resist evil, resist temptation, suffer affliction, enjoy prosperity, break off all sinful courses and take a new course, for so the apostle means, when he says, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,” Phil. iv. 13. The Spirit of Christ is a spirit of strength, 2 Tim. i. 7; it is the spirit of power, it is the soul of the christian’s soul, and the life of his life. Now the strength of a man is in his spirit; the stronger spirit makes the abler man, Rom. xii. 6; and the Spirit of God being the strongest of spirits, indeed the strength of the spirit, it makes the christian in whom it dwells the ablest man. And then again, a christian is a new creature, therefore he is furnished with abilities fit for the new creature. When Adam was created, he was endued with all graces fit for his state of innocence: as when God made the heavens, he beautified it with stars; when he made the earth, he made trees and flowers: so now after the fall, when God brings a man in Christ to be a new creature, he hath abilities furnished to fit him for that new condition. Every particular grace of a new creature is a grace of strength. The Spirit of God is so strong in his children, in those that are truly his, that many have been willing to lay down their lives for his

sake, the dearest possession to them in this world. The apostles were glad to suffer anything for Christ's sake, their hearts were so enlarged by the spirit of love. The spirit of faith too is a mighty spirit, an able spirit, it conquers God himself, as Jacob wrestled with the angel and prevailed, Gen. xxxii. 28 : by the strength of God he overcame God. Under a sense of God's displeasure it will believe God's favor in Christ—it is able to break through the thickest clouds of discomfort whatsoever, "to hope against hope," Rom. iv. 18. You see the fruit and strength of all graces is attributed to faith, Heb. xi. 33 : by faith they overcame, by faith they were strong ; insinuating that faith is not only a strong grace in itself, but it gives vigour and strength to all other graces. Now every christian hath in a more or less measure a spirit of faith and love, and these will carry him through all states and conditions, that will often make men of the world wonder ; for even in his worst state, he hath a spirit above the world ; this faith overcomes the world, and he that is in the christian, (the Spirit of God) is stronger than he that is in the world. Let us try the truth of our state then. If thou art a real christian, what canst thou do ? What sin canst thou resist, what burden of sorrow or affliction canst thou bear ? How canst thou use the good blessings, that God sends thee, without abusing them ? Grace manages all conditions. Thus if thou be a christian, answer to thy name, if not, thou art a mere professor yet. I beseech you, let us not deceive ourselves, the best have cause to mourn for their short comings in this kind ; our consciences tell us, that we might have done much more than we have—that God would have enabled us to do more if we had not been false-hearted and betrayed ourselves ; if we had not been negligent and careless in

the use of means. What a shame is it for christians, who have indeed some truth of grace in them, that they cannot be a little abased in the world, without “fainting in their minds.” Where is the power of grace now? What have they more than the worldling? Nay, a heathen out of principles of morality, would conform his carriage outwardly better. Let us be ashamed then, when we find any murmuring or rising of our corrupt natures in any condition whatsoever, and know that this becomes not a christian. There is indeed a weakness in the best, but that is matter for humiliation. It is not a plea for idleness, therefore if thou hast truth of grace, never plead thine infirmity. Peter was surprised by his timorous spirit into betraying his Master through fear of losing his life; this was his infirmity, which he afterward lamented bitterly.

God is the origin of all our strength, but God hath no intercourse of love with his creature out of Christ: all our comfort, and all our grace come through Christ, who having taken our nature upon him, and having satisfied to the uttermost the justice of God, is fit to derive all grace and comfort to us; for he is near us—he is of our nature—and God in Him is well pleased; so that we may now go boldly to Christ; we are bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. God out of Christ is a consuming fire; but in Christ, God favors poor, sinful, fallen man, he is gracious and lovely to us, and we to him, because Christ his beloved Son hath taken our nature upon him, and now in our nature He is in heaven. So Christ the mediator is the fountain of all strength—He is the spiritual Joseph, that hath laid up store for all that come unto him—He is the Head of his church—He dispenses all riches and treasures—all are in him for the church’s sake. In him we do

all things, as we can do all things for him that died for us, and procured reconciliation and favor for the lost. We can do all things in Him, as a Head to whom we are united ; for there must be first an union, before there can be communion ; so before we can do anything for Christ, we must be in Christ. So then it is Christ by his Spirit, for he doth all by his Spirit ; "The Lord is that Spirit," 2 Cor. iii. 17.—The same Spirit that sanctified his nature in the womb of the virgin, and that sanctified his holy nature, that now he hath in heaven with him : the same Spirit is sent from him to sanctify every member of the church ; all is in the Head, and we out of Christ's fulness receive grace upon grace : there cannot be a beam without the sun—there cannot be a river without a spring—there cannot be a good work, without the spring of good works, Christ. Therefore we should fetch all from him, since there is no grace out of him at all. Learn to do this then in every action, for we may be foiled in every particular action for want of humility and faith ; we must not trust to any grace, or any ability in ourselves, but trust to our spring—go to Christ when we have anything to do. They who think they had grace yesterday and before, and hereupon go not for a supply of new strength to Christ, will fail. Know, that in every act, in every temptation, in every particular suffering, we need new strength, and a greater strength than we had before, if our burden or temptation be greater ; therefore, consider what we have to encounter, and go to Christ for strength. He never upbraids us, as St. James saith, James i. 5. For why is Christ now in our nature in heaven ? Is it not to fill his church with his Spirit ? Why doth he make intercession in heaven ? Is it not that we should not be

discouraged in our warfare, notwithstanding our daily weaknesses? Shall we not then make use of it? He is glorious for us, not for himself, but for his mystical body. As he hath made his natural body glorious, so he will make his mystical body glorious, he being therefore in heaven interceding with God for them. Fetch virtue and strength from Christ on all occasions; then should we be enabled to pass through every condition, however painful, and to live and die in peace. Study Christ daily, not for redemption and reconciliation only (though that chiefly), but study Christ to be all in all to us. Study the promises, God would not have left them in the word but for our good. Take heed of base despair. What shut out the people of Israel from Canaan? It was base despair that shut them out of the earthly Canaan; take heed it shut you not out of the heavenly Canaan. Shall we by despair and unbelief lose Christ and the promises, and thus betray our souls basely unto Satan? I beseech you weigh the importance of these things. "We know not what a day may bring forth," Prov. xxvii. 1. Despair not then beforehand: happen what may, get into Christ—make sure of an interest in him, and then never doubt of strength to carry you through all conditions. He will stand by thee. Where was Paul when he wrote those glorious words, "I can do all things"—was he not in prison? Did Christ desert him? The worldly man may be freed from troubles, but the christian only has strength to carry himself well in trouble. Come what will, if we are Christ's, either we shall be freed from troubles, or have grace patiently to bear them. Either we shall have what we pray for, or contentment without it. Is it not better to have God's grace, than the thing we desire? Is it not better

to have the Spirit of glory rest upon us, than to be left to the satisfaction of our own spirits? Could not God have freed Paul from prison? But where would have been the demonstration of a submissive, contented mind, and a heavenly spirit then? Where would have been the example of a christian bearing the cross patiently? Paul lost nothing: you see how many stars shine in the night of his affliction—what a lustre he had in his dark state of imprisonment. Shall we then fear any condition? No: “Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace,” Job xxii. 21. Get understanding of Christ—his promises—his privileges, and let the sorest trial befall us, we shall be safe.

LXXXVIII. Your harps, ye trembling saints,
Down from the willows take;
Loud to the praise of love Divine,
Bid ev’ry string awake.

Tho’ in a foreign land,
We are not far from home,
And nearer to our house above
We ev’ry moment come.

His grace will to the end
Stronger and brighter shine—
Nor present things, nor things to come,
Shall quench the spark Divine.

Fasten’d within the veil,
Hope be your anchor strong;
His loving Spirit the sweet gale,
That wafts you smooth along.

Or should the surges rise,
And peace delay to come,
Blest is the sorrow, kind the storm,
That drives us nearer home.

The people of his choice,
God will not cast away ;
Yet do not always here expect
On Tabor's Mount to stay.

LXXIX. All the people of God should bewail and tenderly mourn over the remainders of unbelief in their own hearts. There, there is the root of this deadly disease ; and surely, christian, thy heart is not free from such symptoms of it, as appear in other men's hearts. For do but consider—

Symp. 1. What is our impatience in waiting for God's mercy, what is our despondency of spirit, if deliverance come not quickly in the outward or inward straits of soul or body, but a plain symptom of unbelief in our hearts ? He that can believe, can wait God's time ;—what says the psalmist ? “ Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart ; wait, I say, on the Lord,” Psalm xxvii. 14.

Symp. 2. And whence arises our readiness to use sinful means to prevent, or extricate ourselves out of trouble, but from much unbelief lurking in our hearts ? Might but faith be heard to speak, it would say in thine heart, let me rather die ten deaths than commit one sin. It is sweeter and easier to die in my integrity, than to live with a defiled or a wounded conscience : it is nothing but our unbelief that makes us so ready to put forth our hands to iniquity, when the rod of the wicked rests long upon us, or any imminent danger threatens us, Psalm cxxv. 3.

Symp. 3. Does not the unbelief of your hearts show itself in your thoughtfulness and anxiety about earthly things ? Matt. vi. 30, 31. We pretend we have trusted God with our souls to all eternity, and yet we cannot trust Him for our daily bread ; we bring the evils of to-

morrow upon us to-day, ver. 34, and all because we cannot believe more.

O ! Christian, how much better were it to hear such questions as these from thee ! How shall I get a heart suitable to the mercies I enjoy ? How shall I improve them for God ? " What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits ? " This would better become thee, than to afflict thyself with " what shall I eat ? what shall I drink ? or wherewithal shall I be clothed ? "

Symp. 4. What does the slavish fear of death speak, but remains of unbelief still in our hearts ? Are there not many faintings, tremblings and despondencies of mind under the thoughts of death ? O ! if faith were strong, thy spirit would not be so cast down, 2 Cor. v. 1—3 ; the more bondage of fear, the more unbelief.

Symp. 5. To conclude,—what mean all those distractions of thy heart in religious duties but want of faith, weakness of faith, and the actual prevalence of unbelief ? You come to God in prayer, and a thousand vanities beset you : your heart is carried away, it roves, it wanders to the end of the world. Conscience smites for this, and saith, " thou dost but mock God—thy soul will smart for this ; thou feelest neither strength nor sweetness in such duties." You inquire for remedies, and fill the ears of your fellow-christians with your complaints ; and, it may be, see not that the root of all this is in your own unbelief ; but there it is, and till that be cured it will not be better with you.

Yet let not poor christians so mourn as those that have no hope, or ground of comfort, even in this case. For,

First. Though there be remains of unbelief in you, yet you have infinite cause to bless God, that they are but remains. You were once wholly in unbelief, 1 Tim. i.

13, that is, under the full power and dominion of it. Had God cut you off in that state, you must certainly have perished everlastingily. This is the disease, but that was the death of your souls.

Secondly. Though unbelief be in you, yet is it not in you by way of rest, as it is in the ungodly; but by way of daily conflict, and as a burden too heavy to be borne, Psalm xxxviii. 4. Now though the sin be sad, yet the sorrow for it is sincere; and your conflicts with it bring you under a very comfortable sign of grace, Rom. vii.

Thirdly. This is a disease, under which all christians do labour more or less. There is not a heart so holy in all the world, but is in some degree tainted and infected with this disease. And this hath been evident not only in all christians, of whatever attainments, but in all the acts of their faith. Job's faith triumphed in chap. xiii. 15, yet had its eclipse in chap. xix. 20. Abraham was the father of the faithful, a pattern and example of faith; O how high a pitch did his faith reach to in Gen. xxii. And yet there was a time when it failed him, as at Gerar, Gen. xx. 2. The faith of Peter shone out like the sun, in a glorious confession, Matt. xvi. 16, and yet it was not only beclouded, but seemed to be gone down, and quite set, Matt. xxvi. 69—75, though it afterwards recovered itself.

Fourthly. It is not this, or that degree of unbelief that damns a man, but the power, reign and dominion of it, that damns him. Your comfort, indeed, depends much upon the strength of your faith, but your salvation depends upon the truth of it. Most christians come to heaven with a weak and doubting faith; but few with their sails filled with a direct and fresh wind of assurance.

Fifthly. There is enough in Christ to help thine unbelief. He is an excellent physician and knows how to relieve thee, and cure thee ; go to him and groan out thy complaint ; tell him thy heart is pained and troubled with this disease ; and thou shalt find him a faithful, skilful, and merciful Saviour.

Sixthly. It is but a little while before this, with all other diseases bred by it in thy soul, shall be perfectly healed : sanctification is a cure begun ; glorification is a cure completed : the former hath destroyed the dominion, the latter will destroy the existence of it in thy soul ; when you come to heaven, and never till then, will you find yourselves well, and at ease in every part.

From these observations we must conclude that, the deepest sense of sin must not prevent an humble and thankful acknowledgment of the grace of God in his people. It is the fault of most to hide their sins ; and the fault of some to hide their graces. Acceptance of our persons and duties, is a pure act of grace ; there is no duty performed in a perfect act of faith ; all is mixed with unbelief in some degree, the honey and the comb are mixed together, Cant. v. 1. No duty as it comes from us is pure. Our duties need repentance and washing in the blood of Christ. Justly may we suspect that faith for a false faith, which boasts of its own strength, but never mourns in the sense of unbelief. Where there are no conflicts of sin, there needs sound evidence of sincerity. Christians must not wonder to find strange vicissitudes and alterations in the state of their souls ; sometimes a clear, sometimes a cloudy day ; sometimes they have their songs in the night, and sometimes their bitter lamentations. If you ask—why is it thus ? the answer is, there are within you contrary principles struggling in your souls. Is it then any wonder at all to find

peace and trouble, hope and fear, light and darkness
taking their turns, and sharing your time betwixt them ?

LXXX. Begone, unbelief!

My Saviour is near,
And for my relief
Will surely appear :
By pray'r let me wrestle,
And he will perform ;
With Christ in the vessel,
I smile at the storm.

Though dark be my way,
Since he is my guide,
'Tis mine to obey,
'Tis his to provide ;
Tho' cisterns be broken,
And creatures all fail,
The word he has spoken
Shall surely prevail.

His love in time past
Forbids me to think,
He'll leave me at last
In trouble to sink ;
Each sweet Ebenezer,
I have in review,
Confirms his good pleasure
To help me quite through.

Why should I complain
Of want or distress,
Temptation or pain ?
He told me no less :
The heirs of salvation,
I know from his word,
Thro' much tribulation
Must follow their Lord. (Acts xiv. 22.)

How bitter that cup
 No heart can conceive,
 Which he drank quite up,
 That sinners might live !
 His way was much rougher
 And darker than mine ;
 Did Jesus thus suffer,
 And shall I repine ?

Since all that I meet
 Shall work for my good,
 The bitter is sweet,
 The med'cine is food :
 Tho' painful at present,
 'Twill cease before long ;
 And then, O ! how pleasant
 The conqueror's song ! (Rom viii. 37.)

LXXXI. Men have narrow thoughts of God's mercy, because we ourselves are given to revenge ; and we are ready, when we think of our sins, to say, Can God forgive them ? Can God be merciful to such ? But what does God himself say ? " My thoughts are not as your thoughts, nor my ways as your ways," Isaiah lv. 8.

It is good to consider this, and it is a sweet meditation : for the time undoubtedly will come, that unless God's mercy and God's thoughts should be as himself, infinite ; unless his ways should be infinitely above our ways, and his thoughts infinitely above ours in mercy, certainly the soul could receive no comfort.

The soul of a christian acquainted with the word of God, knows that God's mercy is, as himself, infinite. Therefore the scripture sets down the mercies of God, by all dimensions : there is the depth of wisdom, but when it comes to speak of love and mercy, as it is Eph. iii. 18, 19, O the depth, and breadth, and height of this !

Indeed for height, it is higher than the heavens—for depth, it fetches the soul from the nether-most deep : we have depths of misery : “out of the depths have I cried unto thee!” Psalm cxxx. 1; yet notwithstanding, his mercy is deeper than our misery. O the depth of his mercy ! There is a depth of mercy deeper than any misery or rebellion of ours, though we have sunk deep in rebellion. And for the extent of it, his mercy is over all his works, Psalm cxlv. 9, it extends to the utmost parts of the earth. The scripture doth wonderfully enlarge his mercy, beyond all dimensions whatsoever. These things are to good purpose, and it is a mercy to us, that God sets forth himself in mercy in his word ; because the soul, sometime or another when it is awakened (as every one that God delights in is awakened first or last) needs all this ; fallen as we are, it is all little enough.

God is merciful to those that are heavy laden—that feel the burden of their sins upon their souls—such as are touched with the sense of their sins : God meets them half way ; He is more ready to pardon, than they are to seek mercy. As we see in the case of the prodigal, Luke xv, when he had wasted all, when he was reduced as low as a man could be, when he was come to husks, and when he had despised his father’s admonition ; yet, upon resolution to return, when he was stung with a sense of his sins, his father meets him, “and fell on his neck and kissed him,” ver. 20 ; he upbraids him not with his sin.

Take sin with all the aggravations we can, yet if we repent, and abandon our former courses, there is comfort, though we relapse into sin again and again ; if we are commanded to pardon seventy times seven, as Christ hath commanded us, certainly there cannot be more

mercy in the cistern than there is in the fountain—there cannot be more mercy in us than there is in the “Father of mercies,” which God is.

Take sin in its utmost aggravations :—in the greatness of it—Manasseh’s sin—Peter’s denying the Lord, who bought him—the thief on the cross—Paul’s persecution and blasphemy : take sin as great as you will, still God is the Father of mercies. If we consider that He is infinite in mercy, and that the scripture reveals Him as the Father of mercies, there is no question, but there is abundance, nay, a world of comfort to any distressed soul that is ready to cast itself on God’s mercy.

Let this stir up all desponding souls to embrace mercy ; every day to live by mercy ; to plead mercy with God in our daily breaches ; to love and fear God, because “there is mercy with him that he might be feared,” Psalm cxxx. 4. It is a harder matter to make a daily use of this than is generally considered ; those that are the fittest subjects for mercy think themselves farthest off mercy. Come to a broken soul, who is caught in Satan’s snare, whose conscience is on the rack, he thinks, There is no mercy for me, I have been such a sinner,—God hath showed me mercy before, and now I have offended him again and again. Those that are subjects of mercy, that are nearest to mercy, when their conscience is awakened, *think* themselves farthest off mercy, and we have need to press abundance of mercy to put the soul into a frame ; there will be few of us but shall see the necessity of pressing this one time or another before we die. David, when he had sinned, well knew that God was merciful, but it was not a slight mercy that would satisfy him, as we see in Psalm li, how he there presses God for mercy—“according to thine abundant mercy ;” he not only presseth for mercy, but abundance

of mercy—a multitude of mercies ; and unless he had seen infinite mercy in God, when his conscience was awakened with the foulness of his sin :—if the blood of Christ had not cried above it, “ Mercy, mercy,” and abundance of mercy, the soul of David would have sunk down in despair. So other of God’s people, when they have considered the foul nature of sin, how odious it is to God, they could not be pacified or comforted, but that they saw mercy, abundance of mercy ; as the apostle Peter saith, “ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” &c., 1 Pet. i. 3. For faith will not have sufficient foundation but in infinite mercy, in the time of despair, in the time of torment of conscience, in the time of desertion ;—it must be mercy, and the Father of mercies, and the multitudes of compassions, the bowels of love, and all little enough for faith to rest on—the faith of a conscience on the rack : but when faith considers God set forth, not as Satan sets him forth, a God of vengeance, a consuming fire, but as he is set forth in the gospel, it sees him as the Father of Christ, our Father, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort : it sees infinite mercy in an infinite God ; and seeing mercy triumph against justice, and all other attributes, it stays itself here ; the converted and sanctified soul, seeing the odiousness of sin, and the clamourousness of sin, such that it will not be satisfied, but with abundant mercy, it presents God to itself as the Father of mercy and compassion, and finds peace.

Therefore if so be at any time our conscience be smitten and the “ accuser of the brethren ” lay hard upon us, let us think of God as he has revealed himself to us in his word. Times of desertion will come when

we seem forsaken of God : times of desertion will come when the soul will think “God hath forgotten to be gracious, and hath shut up his love in displeasure.” Oh no, it is we are mistaken ; he never shuts up his bowels altogether, he never stops the spring of his mercy ; he doth so to our feeling, but it is his mercy that doth that, it is his mercy that hinders the sense of mercy, it is to make us more capable of mercy afterwards ; therefore, saith the Father, when he comes to us in his love it is for our good ; and when he takes the sense of his love from us, it is for our good—it is to enlarge our souls to be more capable of mercy after, to prize it more, to walk more circumspectly, and to look more to our corruptions. Therefore, in a time of desertion, when God seems to forget us, think of Isaiah xlix. 15, “Can a woman forget ?” Supposing she should be so unnatural, which can hardly be believed, that a mother should forget her own child, yet saith God, “I will not forget you.” So that if there were no bowels to be found in nature, no bowels to be found in a mother, yet is there mercy to be found in the Father of mercy still ; therefore in such times let us make use of it.

And another thing we ought to learn hence is this, if God be so in Christ Jesus, (for we must always plead his complete obedience, the perfection of his atonement, for he is merciful with satisfaction, and yet, is it not his mercy, that he would admit of satisfaction?) it devised a way to satisfy justice, it set all on work ; mercy is above justice in the work of salvation ; justice hath received satisfaction from mercy to make us have higher thoughts of it than of any other attribute of God in the doctrine of the gospel in that kingdom of Christ—it is a kingdom of grace and mercy, if we have hearts to embrace it.

Let this encourage poor desponding souls, the tried

and tempted, the weary and heavy laden, to come to God, and to cast ourselves into the arms of this merciful Father. If we have followed other courses before, let the mercy of God now work upon our souls. In Rom. ii. 4, it is pressed excellently, "that the goodness, (that is the mercy) of God leadeth to repentance ;" it should encourage us to do so. What makes a rebel or a traitor come in, when there is a proclamation out against him ? If there be a pardon sent after him, it is that makes him come in, or else he runs out still farther and farther, while the hue and cry pursue him—but hope and pardon will bring him in again : so it is that which brings the sinner in again to God, the very hope of pardon. Whatever our state is, whatever our state may have been, do not put it off, now is the time, now, "while it is called to-day," Heb. iii. 13 ; take the present time.

LXXXII. Come, weary souls with sin distrest,
The Saviour offers heav'nly rest ;
The kind, the gracious call obey,
And cast your gloomy fears away.

Oppress'd with guilt, a painful load,
O come and spread your woes abroad :
Divine compassion, mighty love,
Will all the painful load remove.

Here mercy's boundless ocean flows,
To cleanse your guilt, and heal your woes ;
Pardon, and life, and endless peace—
How rich the gift ! how free the grace !

Lord, we accept with thankful heart
The hopes thy gracious words impart ;
We come with trembling, yet rejoice,
And bless the kind inviting voice.

Dear Saviour, let thy pow'rful love
Confirm our faith, our fears remove ;
And sweetly influence ev'ry breast,
And guide us to eternal rest.

LXXXIII. The infinite wisdom of God orders all things in the best manner for his own glory, and the final good of his people. If he governed by absolute empire, none in heaven or earth might say unto him, "What doest thou?" But there is an inseparable connexion between his wisdom and his will: he is the "King eternal," and the "only wise God," 1 Tim. i. 17, as the apostle joins those divine titles. In this the excellence of the Divine liberty shines, that it is always regulated by infinite wisdom: "He worketh all things after the counsel of his own will," Eph. i. 11. This is spoken according to human conceptions, in condescension to our weakness, but must be understood in a sense becoming the perfections of God; for counsel cannot properly be attributed to God, whose understanding is infinite, and in one view comprehends all things; but as those things are most complete that are the product of our deliberate reasonings and deep contrivance, so "His work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment," Deut. xxxii. 4. Whenever we are dissatisfied or displeased with his dealings, it is from the error of our minds, and the viciousness of our affections; we presume to correct his providence, as if he were defective in regulating the affairs of this lower world; but "He is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working," Isaiah xxviii. 29. In the creation, this regular and beautiful world was formed out of darkness and confusion; and his providence, that is now mysterious and veiled to us, will bring into glorious order and sweet agreement, those things in their final resolution,

that now seem so perplexed to our apprehensions. It was a confounding reproach from God to Job, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge," Job xxxviii. 2. His passionate exclamations were such, as if the Divine wisdom had not disposed all the afflicting circumstances in the series of his sufferings; and that holy man being convinced of his presumptuous folly, repeats the charge against himself with tears of confusion: "Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered that I understood not;" "wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust ashes," Job xlii. 3, 6.

1. His wisdom will order all things, even the most afflicting for the good of his people. This is a fearful paradox to the carnal mind, that judgeth of good and evil, as present things are pleasant or unpleasant to sense, without regard to what is future. It is like Samson's riddle to the Philistines, "out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness," Judges xiv. 14. But to the mind that hath spiritual discernment, and judgeth of good and evil, as things are conducive or destructive to the happiness of the soul, it is a clear undoubted truth. All things, the most adverse to the believer's present desires, are so overruled and disposed by his providence, as if there were a secret intelligence and concert between them, to promote the happiness of his people, Rom. viii. 28. We have a rare instance of this in the history of Joseph; his envious brethren were the instruments of his exaltation; they sold him for a slave into Egypt to frustrate his prophetic dreams; and there, by many admirable turns of providence, he was advanced to the highest dignity; and then was verified in him and his brethren, "that his sheaf arose and stood upright, and their sheaves stood

around, and did obeisance to his sheaf." God had reserved purposes of greater good for Joseph, than if he had continued under his father's tender eye and care; therefore it is said in his history, that they perfidiously sold him, but God sent him. He, that attentively reads the journeys of the Israelites through the wilderness to Canaan, cannot but wonder at the circuits and indirect motions in their tedious travel for forty years; and when near the borders of the place, so long and ardently desired, they were often commanded to retreat in the same line wherein they had advanced to it: had they chosen the shortest way, and disobeyed the Divine conductor, they had never entered into the land of promise: but following the pillar, that directed their march, though they seemed lost in their intricate wanderings, yet they obtained the joyful possession of it. This was a type of the saints' passage through a troublesome world, to the true rest above, and that they are guided through many cross ways directly to the kingdom of heaven. "Who knows," saith Solomon, "what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow? Eccles vi. 12. That which is desired with importunity, as tending to his happiness, often proves his ruin: some had not been so wicked, and consequently not so miserable, if their lusts had not been excited by riches and power: others had not been secured from destructive temptations, but in a low and afflicted state. It is, therefore, both our duty and interest not to pray absolutely for any temporal thing; but when our desires are most passionate, to say with the humility, the reverence and obedience of our Saviour, "not my will, but thine be done." We shall find ourselves more happy by the Divine disposal of things, than if we had obtained our dearest wishes, and most ardent

prayers. And when we shall come to the top of the holy hill, and look down on the various circuits of providence by which we ascended, we shall then understand that wisdom and love conducted us safely to happiness : we shall approve and admire all the Divine methods in order to our blessed end. Now the belief of this should compose us to a patient and cheerful resignation of ourselves to God's providence and pleasure. Who would not accept of the counsel of a friend that proceeds from love, though his judgment were not so exact as to be relied on ? Much more should we thankfully receive the appointment of God, where knowledge and affection are equally superlative, in whom there is united the wisdom of a father's, and the tenderness of a mother's love. Briefly, as Jonathan by tasting the honey at the end of his rod, had his eyes enlightened ; so the end of the severest chastisements will convince believers that the providence of God was more benign and propitious than they could imagine. " His ways are above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts ; as the heavens are above the earth." This point is applicable to us by way of reproof for our unsubmissive behaviour in afflictions—our uncompliance with the Divine disposals. Some entertain a secret discontent at God's afflicting providence ; and this blots out the memory of former mercies, and takes away the relish of present mercies ; as the sweet showers of heaven that fall into the sea, are turned into its brackish taste : such neither enjoy God nor themselves. What egregious folly and vile ingratitude is this ! All we have is from His most free favor : and shall we peevishly slight his benefits, because our desires are not gratified in every respect ? Others are moved with anger and vexation for the evils that befall them ; as the red hot iron under the hammer casts abroad fiery

sparks, so their stubborn, fierce spirits, when afflicted, break forth in expressions of impatience and displeasure. They count it a base abjectness of mind, a despicable pusillanimity, to humble themselves under God's judgments, and with contrition for their sins to implore his mercy. Stubborn sinners, when they feel the effects of God's anger, are raging and furious in their passions and expressions : "the foolishness of man perverteth his way," his most grievous sufferings are the fruits of his sins, "and his heart fretteth against the Lord," Prov. xix. 3. This is a high indignity to God, and an injury to himself. For a vile creature, a base guilty wretch to murmur and storm against God's righteous judgments, argues a prodigious forgetfulness both of its dependence and obnoxiousness to the Divine tribunal. It is said of the adherents of antichrist, that they were "scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over the plagues, and they repented not to give him glory," Rev. xvi. 9. Infinite insolence ! such obstinate souls the prince of darkness possesses as his peculiar dominion ; these have more need of conversion than consolation. Besides, by impatience and vexatious fretting, they increase their pains, turn the rod into a serpent, and God's mighty hand is more heavy by their resistance. Bold exhortations irritate God's anger, rather than incline his mercy. "With the froward," saith the Psalmist, "thou wilt shew thyself froward," Psalm xviii. 26 ; or, as it is rendered in the margin, "wrestle." The strongest sinner is not a match for the Almighty ; if his anger excite his power, how easily, "how suddenly are they destroyed without remedy," Prov. xxix. i. Stubborn impatience, under the inflictions of God's righteous providence, is the nearest step to find ruin. Others are so cast down and

broken by afflictions, that their continuance in the world is but a living death ; everything nourishes their grief, and the best means afforded for their reviving and comfort are ineffectual. Sorrow flows into despair, they lament and languish as if their case were hopeless and remediless. The fountain of this black stream is an undue esteem and affection for inferior things ; and what is reserved for the blessed Creator ? If a temporal loss be the most afflicting evil, it is a sign that God was not valued and loved as the chiefest good. The difficulty of receiving consolation shows the necessity for their being afflicted ; the language of such determined sorrow is, “they have taken away my gods, and what have I more ?” Judges. xviii. 24. The sole objects of their happiness are removed, and they refuse to be comforted, as if no less sacrifice were due to the remembrance of their loss than life itself : what a disparagement is this of the Divine excellencies. “Are the consolations of God small with thee ?” Job. xv. 11. Is not His love able to compensate any loss ? Is not the enjoyment of Himself sufficient to satisfy us without the fruition of one earthly comfort ? This dejection of spirit is equally undutiful as it is uncomfortable—our griefs are sometimes as vain and as guilty as our joys—there is a tincture of disobedience in our tears, for we are commanded to “mourn as if we mourned not, for the fashion of the world passeth away,” 1 Cor. vii. 30, 31 ; and we at the same time break his law and our own peace. Our disobedience in this is aggravated as being not only contrary to the authority and sanctity of the lawgiver, but to his loving-kindness and compassion. Oh ! the miserable blindness of human minds, and the more miserable because voluntary. Who is more deservedly unhappy than one that sits upon the bank of a river, and yet is tormented and

dies with thirst ?—the clear fresh stream passes before him, allures and invites him, but he will not stoop to drink ; this is the case of those who neglect and refuse the spiritual consolations in the gospel, that are compared to the flowing rivers of living water, for their cooling, refreshing quality, John vii. 38, 39. They actively bring trouble upon their souls ; their passions are the instruments of their misery. He that is his own executioner has no excuse for dying ; he is justly, because wilfully, miserable. What a blot is this upon the gospel. Those who will not be comforted will not be christians ; by the same Holy Spirit, who is called the Comforter, we are the one and the other. If the precious promises of the gospel do not alleviate our sorrows, it is not from infirmity, but from unbelief. It is an incredible miracle that a person can be in reality a christian, and not capable of consolation, as if eternal life was not purchased by Christ for his people, or the present sufferings were comparable to the future glory ; for the misery, that passeth with time, is not of moment with respect to the blessedness that is established for ever. Let us then be excited to transcribe this divine lesson (as full of excellency as of difficulty), into our hearts and lives. It is easy in speculation to consent to the reasonableness of this duty, but how hard to practise it, and to bear (not too sensibly) such evils as are incurable here ; a deliberate, universal, constant subjection to God's will, though contrary to our carnal desires and interests, how rarely is it to be found among those, who in the title and profession are his servants ! In “active obedience” some will readily perform some particular commands, but withdraw subjection from the rest ; and, in “passive obedience,” many will submit to lighter and shorter afflictions, but if an evil come that nearly touches the heart, or that remains

long without redress, they become impatient, or so dejected as to neglect their duty. I shall therefore super-add to the former arguments, wherein the necessity, the equity, and the policy of our dutiful resignation to God's providence is clearly set forth, some other motives and directions that may be useful and effectual for this end.

Look frequently to Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith: the Divine wisdom to reform the world, assumed the human nature, and expressed in a holy conversation upon earth, a living copy of his precepts, to direct us in the various parts of our duty; and, because the exercise of humility, self-denial, and the rest of the suffering graces, is so difficult to our frail and tender nature, he ascended the cross, and instructs us by his suffering, to suffer with his affections, leaving us his example, as the best lecture of our duty,—his sufferings concern us not only in point of merit, but conformity. We can never enjoy the benefit of his passion, without following his pattern. His example is the rule of the highest perfection, and we are under the greatest obligation to imitate and honor Him, who is our Sovereign and our Saviour, to whom we owe our redemption from everlasting misery, and the inheritance of glory. It is the apostle's advice to the afflicted, "to consider him, that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary, and faint in your mind," Heb. xii. 3. The deduction is with greater force to make us humble and patient; if we consider the infinite dignity of his person. He was the eternal and only Son of God, and descended from the throne of his majesty, divested himself of his robes of insupportable light, and was obedient to the death of the cross. What are the highest and best of men to him? Were it not extremely unbecoming and undutiful for a subject to

refuse obedience to a just law, if the king that made the law should voluntarily observe it, and reserve no other advantage to himself, than the honor of enacting it? Our Saviour did not stand upon the dignity and liberty of his person being equal with God, and our king, but entirely complied with the law; and shall we complain of its rigour? Consider, too, the greatness of his sufferings. They were incomparable as to their value, so in their degrees. He endured the equal extremities of infamy and torment, that are so contrary to the inclinations of mankind. He was crowned with a crown of thorns, scourged, spit upon, reviled, derided, crucified; insensible nature, as if capable of understanding and affection, was disordered in its whole frame at his death. The heavens sympathized in eclipses of the sun—in the darkness of the air at midday, as if it were midnight; the earth quaked with tremblings, and the rocks were rent asunder. The sufferings too of his soul from the incensed justice of God were inconceivably great. What is the worst we suffer, either immediately from God, or instrumentally from men, to his bitter passion? Our sufferings are but superficial shadows of misery, compared to his deep sorrows. His sufferings were most undeserved—for he was the Holy One of God; his conception without the least taint of sin, his life of strictest purity, and complete obedience to the Divine law. We may read the process of our sins, and understand their guilt in his passion. “He was made sin for us, (a sacrifice to atone the Divine displeasure), who knew no sin.” As David, when guilty of murder and adultery, was fired with indignation at the relation of the rich man killing the only lamb of his poor neighbour, and sparing his own numerous flock; and when the prophet unveiled the parable, and surprised

him with that piercing reproach, “Thou art the man!” he presently by that fiction in another was convinced of his own true guilt, and deeply afflicted in the sense of it: thus we are apt to conceive indignation against the murderers of our Saviour, the apostate apostle, the malicious priests, the unrighteous judge, the bloody soldiers; but conscience, as a true Nathan, may charge us to have been in that wicked conspiracy against the Lord of glory, for it was our sins that condemned and crucified him. And as our sins were the impulsive cause of His sufferings, so our good is the effect of them. Christ suffered the death of the cross, that his blood might be our ransom, his ignominy the purchase of our glory, his torments the merit of our blessedness, his death the seed of immortal life to us; but we suffer the just punishment of our sins. How marvellous were His willing obedience, Divine patience, and invincible constancy in suffering for us! In his distress, the whole army of heaven were in readiness for his protection and rescue, upon the least signification of his will: “If I prayed to my Father, he would send me twelve legions of angels.” Nay, he had the springs and keys of the Divine power in his hands, and could by a word have destroyed his enemies; but he “freely gave himself for us!” and without resistance, without complaint, took up his cross. Now our Saviour, who had the fulness of the Spirit, communicates to us the first fruits of it, faith and love, humility and patience, peace and joy, to support us under affliction. Consider the excellent reward of his sufferings; he was abased below men, and is advanced above all the angelical orders, and is the eternal object of their praises—never was suffering so grievous, never was issue so glorious. “For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despised the shame, and is set down

at the right hand of the majesty on high," Heb. xii. 2. Now our blessed Saviour hath promised, " To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne," Rev. iii. 21. Unfainting perseverance shall be rewarded with the glory of our Redeemer, Gal. vi. 9. And is not the prospect and expectation of this sufficient to establish our minds, and make us patiently endure the greatest afflictions ?

The consideration of the suffering saints in all ages is a powerful persuasive to patience. Thus the apostle James directs christians, " Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience," James v. 10 ; and we have great encouragement from thence, if we consider,

1. That those who are of most precious account with God, and highly favored by him, are usually exercised with sharp afflictions. The singularity and greatness of a calamity exasperate the sorrow, when it is apprehended as a sign of extraordinary guilt in the afflicted, and of severe displeasure in God that sends it ; but to prevent trouble that arises from that apprehension, the scripture records the heavy afflictions that happened to God's chosen servants and favorites :—Moses, whom God honored with the most familiar and condescending discoveries of himself, was tried by long afflictions. David, a man after God's own heart, 1 Sam. xiii. 14 ; Acts xiii. 22, was a long time hurled to and fro by tempestuous persecutions from his unjust and implacable enemies. Isaiah, who was honored with such heavenly revelations, that his describing the sufferings of Christ seems rather the history of an evangelist, than the vision of a prophet, was sawn asunder.

2. Their nature was as frail as ours ; their afflictions as cutting and severe ; yet how patiently and courageously did they endure the most cruel sufferings.

3. We have the same blessed Comforter to assist us as they had, the Holy Spirit. He, that is styled the Spirit of Power, infuses a holy courage to bear the heaviest sufferings. Now it is the apostle's inference from the history of the saints under the Old Testament, some of whom died martyrs, and others lived martyrs, by their constant and generous suffering of various evils for divine truth ; " Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us ; and let us run with patience the race set before us," Heb. xii. 1. There is no kind of affliction, and no part of our duty, whereof there is not presented to us in scripture some example for our encouragement and imitation. It is also worthy of observation, that christians have a special obligation, encouragement, and assistance, to bear affliction with cheerfulness, above the believers of the Old Testament. For under the Mosaic dispensation, outward prosperity, riches, honor, long life, were the open expressions of God's favor, promised by the terms of that covenant, as rewards to obedience. Yet even then, some of the most excellent saints were illustrious examples of patient, suffering affliction. But in the gospel God hath declared that his design is to train up his children by sufferings, for their future happiness, Acts xiv. 22. And we find the truth of this by manifold experience, from the first ages of the christian church. St. John, by revelation, " beheld a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, that stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed

with white robes, and palms in their hands ; and they all came out of great tribulation, and had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," Rev. vii. 9—14. Now, since the cross is an appendix to the gospel, we should with more prepared minds submit to it. Besides, if believers then, who only enjoyed starlight—less clear discoveries of the glorious world to come, were so patient and constant in suffering for the truth, how much more should we be animated in our troubles, to whom the "Sun of Righteousness" appears, revealing life and immortality by the gospel ! If they, who were partakers of the Holy Spirit in lesser degrees, were supported, should not christians, that receive the graces of the Spirit in richer abundance, be more comforted ? Besides, patience has a special eminence above all other graces, and advances a christian to the highest honor and perfection that is attainable here. All graces are of the same divine extraction, and have the same general effect on the soul—they come from God, and produce a godlike temper and disposition ; but they are distinguished by their objects and operations ; some are exercised about great things, others are humble, and conversant in meaner things, and their operations are less eminent. It is the counsel of St. James, "let patience have her perfect work" in bearing afflictions, though heavy and continued, "that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing," James i. 4. It is the most difficult part of our work, and without it, we can neither obey the commands, nor obtain the promises of the gospel. Christian patience is the true fortitude, and draws other graces into exercise. What the temper is to material weapons, patience is to other graces,—their strength is derived from it. This was

the most glorious perfection of Christ's obedience ; "for it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings," Heb. ii. 10. When our Saviour was nailed to the cross, and was the mark wherein all the poisoned arrows of rage and malice were received, he seemed only to suffer, yet even then he performed the most divine exploits, and obtained the most glorious victory ; he reconciled God, disarmed the law, subdued Satan, broke the gates of hell, destroyed death, and rescued us miserable, forlorn captives. Upon this account Chrysostom breaks forth in rapturous expressions, that our Saviour, suffering on the cross, was more glorious than in his creating the world. Thus the patience of a christian, which in appearance is only a quiet bearing affliction from God, yet produces many blessed effects ; a believer while he feels the weight of God's hand, incessantly seeks his face with the most ardent affections. He doth not murmur at the displeasure of God, but mourns bitterly that he hath deserved it. He surrenders himself to the Divine displeasure, which is the purest act of obedience. He strives to subdue his unruly passions, which is a greater victory than the achievements of the most celebrated conquerors. It is true the power of grace is very conspicuous in resisting pleasant temptations, the pernicious attractions of the senses and carnal appetites, but more in the battles of patience ; by how much it is more easy to nature to be content without unnecessary and superficial pleasures, than to endure oppressive and painful evils. St. Peter declares "that the Spirit of glory rests upon suffering christians," 1 Peter iv. 14. They are the temples of the Holy Spirit, the eternal God, wherein he

displays his divine virtue and glorious power. In short, God usually conducts his people to the highest degrees of grace and glory in suffering ; the more they are tried and refined, the brighter their crown will be.

It is, too, a blessed assurance of our election by the most free and unchangeable love of God. The apostle tells afflicted christians, "that whom he did foreknow, he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren," Rom. 8. 29. If we suffer with His divine patience, with his humble affections, it is a clear and certain evidence, that we are appointed to reign with him. If we bear the image of our suffering Saviour in our earthly state, we shall bear his glorious image in the heavenly. The well-grounded hope of this is very comfortable in the deepest afflictions, and will encourage us to persevere in humbling sufferings. For if His sovereign pleasure has ordained us to eternal life, how just is it that we should with an entire and resigned submission yield up ourselves to the conduct of his wisdom, as to the ways by which we shall obtain it. To this, if we add a filial submission to God's chastisements, we have a blessed testimony of our adoption. It is the apostle's comfortable inference, "if ye endure chastisement, God dealeth with you as sons ;" that is, if without murmuring or fainting, if with that respect and subjection that are due to the high and holy providence of God, then we may be assured of his paternal relation to us, and his "rod comforts us," Psalm xxiii. 4, as the strokes of it are a proof of his care and love to us. From hence proceeds inexpressible and peculiar consolation to afflicted christians ; the same affliction as to the matter and circumstances, may be upon humble, meek, sufferers, and refractory stubborn sinners, "that kick

against the pricks." But the two classes are distinguished by the intention of the Almighty. They are sent to the humble, as corrections from the wise love of a Father, who dearly regards their souls—to the obdurate, as vengeance from the righteous severity of a judge. Upon the humble they fall as soft as a shower of snow; upon the other, as a storm of fiery hail upon the Egyptians; and the issue of them is as different as heaven and hell.

Lastly,—This sharp discipline continues only during our minority here; when we arrive at the state of perfection, we shall not need it; and this life is but a short transition to the next world. What comparison is there between a few years, and the volume of eternal ages? This is the consolation of the apostle, "The time is short, let those that weep be as if they wept not." Within a little while afflicted saints ascend to the region of blessedness; and no cloud of sorrow, no shadow of fear, no darkness of anxiety can reach so high to darken and disturb their peace: "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" of the everlasting day. "For a moment have I hid my face from thee, but with everlasting kindness will I receive thee, saith the Lord," Isaiah liv. 7, 8. Death is the last step out of mortality and misery. "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh," James v. 8.

LXXXIV. In the floods of tribulation
While the billows o'er me roll,
Jesus whispers consolation,
And supports my fainting soul:
Sweet affliction,
That brings Jesus to my soul.

In the darkest dispensations,
Will my faithful Lord appear,
With his richest consolations,
To re-animate and cheer :
Sweet affliction,
Thus to bring my Saviour near.

Floods of tribulation heighten,
Billows still around me roar,
Those, who know not Christ, they frighten ;
But my soul defies their pow'r :
Sweet affliction,
Thus to bring my Saviour near.

In the sacred page recorded,
Thus his word securely stands,
" Fear not, I'm in trouble near thee,
Nought shall pluck thee from my hands :"
Sweet affliction,
Ev'ry word my love demands.

All I meet I find assists me
In my path to heav'nly joy,
Where, tho' trials now attend me,
Trials never more annoy :
Sweet affliction,
Ev'ry promise gives me joy.

Wearing there a weight of glory,
Still the path I'll ne'er forget,
But exulting, cry, It led me
To my blessed Saviour's seat :
Sweet affliction,
Which has brought me to his feet.

LXXXV. Men, in great straits, when they are not able to make defence against pursuing enemies, run to their hiding place, as the Israelites did from the Philis-

tines. "When the men of Israel saw that they were distressed, they hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in rocks, in high places, and in pits," 1 Sam. xiii. 6; and so God's children, when they are too weak for their enemies, seek a safe and sure hiding place: "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself," Prov. xxii. 3; certainly there is a hiding place for God's children, if we had but the wisdom to find it out—and where is it but in God? "Lord, thou art my hiding place, thou shalt preserve me from trouble." So again—"In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me: he shall set me upon a rock," Psalm xxvii. 5. God's protection of his people is a secret, hidden mystery, as everything that pertains unto God is to the carnal man. The person hidden is seen abroad every day following his business—serving his generation—doing that work which God hath given him to do, yet is he hidden, while he is seen, by the secret power and love of God dispensing all things for his protection, the man is kept safe by ways, which the world knows not of. "Thou shalt hide him in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man," Psalm xxxi. 20. There is a secret power of God by which his people are upheld and maintained by one means or another, which they see not, and cannot find out. So there is that in God, that we may trust him with our souls, with our bodies, with our peace, with our goods, with our good name, with our all; all that concerns us between this and the day of judgment, as St. Paul did—"I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." His soul and all the concerns of it he durst trust in the hands of God. Our soul is much sought after; Satan, that hath

lost the favor of God himself, envies that others should enjoy it, therefore he pursues God's people with great malice and power; but let them put it into the hands of God, he is able to keep it. And so for outward things this hiding place is large enough for all we have. "Thou shalt keep them secretly as in a pavilion, from the strife of tongues." As the hearts of men are in the hands of God, so are their tongues, Exod. xi. 7. There is the same reason why we should trust God in all things, as when we trust in him for one thing. And indeed, did we truly, and on scripture grounds, trust him for one thing, we should trust him for all. If we did trust him with our souls, we should without anxious care trust him with our bodies, our secular interests and concerns also. There is safety till the trouble is over, and we may be kept as quiet in God, as if there was no danger. "Under the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge until these calamities are overpast," Psalm lvii. 1. There is an allusion to the chicken under the hen's wing;—when hawks or birds of prey are abroad, that are ready to seize upon them with their talons, they run to the hen's wings, and there they are safe. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut the doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast," Isaiah xxvi. 20. Here we have an allusion to a storm which is soon over; it is as a little cloud, that will easily be blown over; but in the mean time here is a covert and defence. The use of God's protection and love is best known in a time of straits and difficulties. There is not only safety, but comfort also. Christians, it is not a dead refuge or hiding place, but, as the Psalmist says, "None of them who trust in God shall be desolate," Psalm xxxiv. 22. There are sweet support,

spiritual experience, and inward comforts ; so that a believer, that is hidden in the secret of God's presence, fares better than all those who have the world at their command, and go on in ease and plenty, if we judge of his condition by spiritual considerations. And not only will He be his protection, but He will be a sun, as well as a shield, Psalm lxxxiv. 11. As a "shield," he will keep off all dangers from us ; as a "sun," he will give all things that belong to our blessedness ; "He will give grace and glory." The word of God shows not only what God **CAN** do herein, but what he **WILL** do for our sakes. To Abraham, God said, "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward," Gen. xv. 1. Abraham might be under some dread that the kings he had lately vanquished would work him some trouble, and then God comes and appears to him and comforts him, and says to him, "Fear not, I am thy shield." Here then we may rest ; for where else can we hope to find a resting place but in the arms of God's protection—in his attributes, promises, and providences ? His word invites us so to make use of God—to enter into Him as a covert from the storm, while it seems to rage, and be likely to overwhelm us. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty," Psalm cxi. 1. He that committeth himself to God shall not be thrust out, but shall be suffered to dwell there, and enjoy the benefit of a covert and defence ; we have this assurance repeated again and again in scripture. "Every word of God is pure ; he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him," Prov. xxx. 5. Do not think these are careless expressions, dropped into the word of God by chance ; Oh no ! they are the sure and pure words of the Lord himself, that will yield comfort, peace, and happiness, to them that flee unto him :—it is only to

trust and to have. If you will glorify God by trusting him, and depend upon him according to his word, you will find it to be so. We miss of our protection and defence by our doubts, unbelief, and distrust of God. All those, that in time of danger are duly sensible of it, and make use of God as their refuge and hiding place, shall find him to be that to them, which their faith expects from him. There is a keeping of the outward man, and a keeping of the inward man. As to the outward man, "all things come alike to all," Eccles. ix. 2; the christian is safe, whatever becomes of the man; the Lord will keep him to his heavenly kingdom, 2 Tim. iv. 17, 18. What the christian desires mainly to be kept is his soul, that he may not miscarry—blemish his profession, and dishonor God. I say, we cannot absolutely expect temporal safety. The righteous are liable to many troubles, Psalm xxxiv. 19, therefore, in temporal things, God will not keep off the temporal stroke, but leave us to many uncertainties, or at least hold us in doubt about it, that we may trust his goodness. When we trust God we may trust all his attributes, not only his power that he is able to preserve, but his goodness, that he will do what is best for us, that there may be a submission and a referring all to his will. God will certainly make good his promise, but this trust lies not in an absolute certainty of success as to temporal things. However, this should not discourage us from making God our refuge, because promises of better things are sure enough, and God's keeping us in suspense about other things is no evidence he will not afford them to us, it is his usual course, (and few instances can be given to the contrary), to have a special regard to his trusting servants, and to hide them secretly. They, that know His name, will find that he hath never forsaken

them that put their trust in him, Psalm ix. 10. It is the only sure way to be safe; whereas, to perplex our souls with distrust, even about these outward things, dishonors God's faithfulness, and is the way to bring ruin upon ourselves. You see then what respect the word hath to this privilege, that God is a shield and a hiding place. The word discovers God under these figures, the word invites and encourages us to put God to this use, the word assures us of his divine protection, it directs us to the qualification of the persons that shall enjoy this privilege, "They that can trust God;" and it directeth us to expect the blessing, not with absolute confidence of success, but in humble submission to his will. This quiets the heart in waiting God's leisure. "Our soul waiteth for the Lord, he is our help and our shield," Psalm xxxiii. 26. If so, then faith is quietly to wait God's leisure; till he send deliverance, his promise must bear up our hearts, and we must be contented to tarry his time,—our impatience must not make us outrun God. This will fortify the heart against present difficulties. When all visible helps are cut off, yet may we encourage ourselves in the Lord. When Israel were wandering in the wilderness, and had neither house nor home, then Moses, that man of God, pens that Psalm, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations," Psalm cx. 1. What was wanting to sense, they saw made up in the all-sufficiency of God. And here is the use of faith, when in defiance of all difficulties, we can see an all-sufficiency in God to counterbalance that which is wanting to sense. "Lord, thou art my shield and glory, and the lifter up of my head," Psalm iii. 3. David wrote this psalm when he was driven from his palace by his son Absalom; when he was in danger, God was his shield; when his kingdom and honor were

laid in the dust, God was his glory ; when he was under sorrow and shame, and enemies insulting over him ; when the people rose against him, and he was in great dejection of spirit, "God was the lifter up of his head." This is getting under the covert of this shield, or within the compass of this hiding place : "Into thy hands I commit my spirit, for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth," Psalm xxxi. 5. David was then in great danger, the net was laid for him, as he said in a former verse, and when he was likely to perish, what does he do ? he casts all his care upon God, and trusts him with his life, his safety : "Into thy hands I commit my spirit."

The use of faith is to quicken us to go on cheerfully in our path, and with a quiet heart resting on God's love, power, and truth. To persuade us to contentment in a time of trouble, though our condition be not what we desire, yet if we have but a hiding place, if God vouchsafe us a little liberty in our service, we ought to be content, if he will give us safety though not plenty,—for here is not our rest. God never undertook in his covenant to maintain us in such a state, nor thus to enlarge our earthly portion ; if he will vouchsafe a little peace and safety to us during the time of our pilgrimage we ought to be content. And unless God be our hiding place, the strongest defences in the world are not enough to keep us from danger. All the shifts we run into will only entangle us the more, drive us farther from God, and to greater suffering. Many thus run away from God's protection, and seek out means of safety for themselves ; thus they do but plunge themselves into troubles so much the more ; there is much sin and danger in departing from God ; he can soon blast our confidences. God will blast our carnal shifts, Jer. xvii. 15—18. No hurt can come to us without God's leave.

No creature can move or stir, not only but by God's permission, but by his influence: others may have a will to hurt us, but not the power, unless given them from above, as Christ told Pilate. Satan is a raging adversary against the people of God, but he is forced to ask leave before he can touch either Job's goods or his person; he could not touch his skin, nor anything that belonged to him, without permission from God, Job i. Nay, he must ask leave to enter into the herd of swine, Matt. viii. 31. Constantly then, make use of God. You may think this advice not needed by you, because you are at present out of fears and dangers; but what saith the scripture? "Be not high-minded but fear,"—and again, "Blessed is the man that feareth always." Are you not constantly to make use of God, whether your state be well or ill, and to live upon God at all times? All our comforts are from God, as well as our support in trouble. Certainly, he that lives upon God in prosperity, will live upon him in adversity. Oh! when you are at ease and abound in all things, and consider Him as the author of all your happiness, and the giver of all your gifts, you will learn better to make Him your refuge when all things fail. But he that lives upon the creature in prosperity, when the creature fails will be in utter distress, and know not which way to turn for comfort, Jer. xvii. 13, 14.

LXXXVI. When God's right arm is bar'd for war,
And thunders clothe his cloudy car,
Where, where, oh where! shall man retire,
T'escape the horrors of his ire?

"Tis he, the Lamb, to whom we fly,
While the dread tempest passes by;
God sees his well-beloved's face,
And spares us in our hiding place.

Thus, while we dwell in this low scene,
The Lamb is our unfailing screen ;
To him, tho' guilty, still we run,
And God still spares us for his Son.

While yet we sojourn here below,
Pollutions still our hearts o'erflow
Fall'n, abject, mean, a sentenc'd race,
We deeply need a hiding place.

Yet courage—days and years will glide,
And we shall lay these clods aside ;
Shall be baptis'd in Jordan's flood,
And wash'd in Jesu's cleansing blood.

Then pure, immortal, sinless, freed,
We, thro' the Lamb, shall be decreed ;
Shall meet the Father face to face,
And need no more a hiding place.

LXXXVII. God, by afflictions, tries whether the faith of the christian be well grounded and saving, or whether it be weak or strong—whether it be able to stay itself only upon a promise, or whether it want the support of sense and visible enjoyments to bear it up—whether it be a faith that is wrought in him only by conviction, or a faith that is wrought in him through conversion—whether it be a faith wrought in him only by evidence of the truth, or a faith that is accompanied by a sincere love of the truth. And therefore, he should rejoice in sufferings that will help him to determine this important question. If his faith be such as will overcome the world, if it can persuade him to “ esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world,”—if it respect more the promises of God, than the threatenings of men—and future happiness, more

than present comfort—if it can bear both the anvil and the furnace, this is a faith that is true and genuine ; and when it is thus tried, “ will be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ,” 1 Peter i. 7. And have you not then great cause to rejoice in afflictions, which afford you a means to know whether your graces be genuine or not?—whether they be such as will bear God’s judgment and trial hereafter, by bearing affliction and chastisements here? Certainly that christian hath great reason to suspect himself who cannot rejoice that he is going to heaven, though God sends a fiery chariot to fetch him. And if thy sorrows add any degree of fortitude to thy patience, thou hast more reason to rejoice than to repine; for nothing in this present life is to be accounted good or evil, but only as it respects the advantage and disadvantage which our graces receive by it. Now, if God confirm and augment thy patience under sufferings, sufferings are mercies, afflictions are favors : he blesseth thee by chastisements, and crowneth thee with loving-kindness, even while he seems to crown thee with thorns. And wilt thou not triumph at this, O christian ! especially considering the end of thy patience, which is hope, peace, and eternal life?—see that excellent scripture to this purpose, “ We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope ; and hope maketh not ashamed,” Rom. v. 3—5. And, from this we may observe, by-the-way, that it is far better to have patience under afflictions, than to be freed from them : it is more cause of joy to suffer the hand and will of God patiently, than not to suffer at all. It is not enough, O christians ! that ye can bear some afflictions, and that only for a time ; but if you will be perfect, you must suf-

fer the whole will of God, and that with constancy unto the end ; patience ought not to prescribe either to the kind, measure, or degree of our sufferings ; say not, therefore, "I could bear any affliction : but this which I now lie under is intolerable. Or I could cheerfully bear it, if I could see any issue out of it ; but this is endless and remediless." But a perfect patience stoops to the heaviest burdens ; and carries them as long as God pleases, without murmuring or repining, and, if that be to the grave, it knows that what is now a load, shall then be found to be a treasure.

What is this patience which a christian ought to exercise when he is under sufferings ?

It is a grace of God's Spirit, wrought in the heart of a true christian, whereby he is sweetly inclined quietly and willingly to submit to whatsoever the Lord shall think fit to lay upon him ; calming all the passions, which are apt to rise up in him against God's dispensations, with the acknowledgment of his infinite sovereignty, wisdom, justice, and mercy, in those chastisements, which he is pleased to bring upon him. It is no narcotic virtue, to stupify us, and take away the sense and feeling of afflictions—for that is no suffering which is not felt : and if patience were only to deprive a man of the feeling of his sorrows, it would only destroy its own object, and so cease any longer to be patience. And therefore, those who are insensible under the hand of God, and who take no notice of his judgments, when his hand is stretched out against them, are no more to be accounted patient, than a block is when it is hewn and cut. Nay, patience is so far from taking away the sense of sufferings, that it rather quickens it: there is no man that more feels an affliction than a christian doth, for he refers his

chastisements to his deserts ; he looks inwardly, and sees his own guilt and sin as that which provokes God to afflict him. And this adds a great deal of gall and wormwood to the bitter cup, and makes every affliction to touch his conscience, as well as his outward man ; he cannot but with grief of heart consider, that ever he should incense his merciful Father to use such severe discipline towards him. Thus grace never destroys, it only regulates and corrects nature. It will permit thee to shed tears, so long as they run clear from the mud of thy sinful passions and rebellious affections. It will permit thee to complain of what thou sufferest, so long as it keeps thee from complaining of that God from whom thou sufferest. Thou mayest lawfully, without any wrong done to patience, express thy grief in all the outward and natural signs of it ; only beware that it exceed not its due bounds and measures. Patience consists chiefly in a due composure of mind ; and those may be very impatient persons, and fret inwardly, who yet may express but little emotion in their outward demeanour. In patience, there must be a quiet, willing submission to the hand of God, which the scripture expresses by "taking up our cross," Matt. xvi. 24 ;—" receiving evil at the hands of God," Job ii. 10 ;—" accepting the punishment of our iniquities," Lev. xxvi. 41, which all signify the willing submission of the soul under whatever God shall see fit to lay upon it. It is also a calming of all those impetuous storms and tempests, which are apt to arise in a man's heart, when he is under any heavy suffering. Indeed, it is impossible but the affections will be stirring ; but patience takes off the eagerness and bitterness of them ; it ought to keep them from excess, that the soul may not be ruffled into a tempest by them—that all

those violent emotions, which distract reason, rend the soul to pieces, and make men unfit for the service of God or the employments of their lives ; these patience ought to quell and suppress. It teaches us to do so upon right grounds. It looks off from the absolute nature of the affliction, considered as it is in itself, to the relative nature of it—as it is dispensed to us by God ; and so concludes, that though the cup in itself be bitter, yet, in our Father's hand it is salutary, and knows that it shall work for our advantage—make us partakers of God's holiness here, and meeten us for glory hereafter. What said St. Paul, when he spoke of the bonds and afflictions that awaited him ?—“None of these things move me.” But an impatient man flies out against heaven and earth—blasphemes God and curses men—rages at his sufferings, and gnaws the very chains that tie him up ; and instead of humbling himself under God's chastening hand, is exasperated by his punishment ; and with that impious king, cries out in all the extremity of his anguish, “This evil is of the Lord—why should I wait upon the Lord any longer ?” 2 Kings vi. 33. The sense that God had done it, should lay a check upon all intemperate eruptions of our grief and passions. It should prevent us from presumptuously expostulating with His infinite sovereignty. Shall we, vile dust and ashes, dare to control his proceedings, or take upon us to censure any of his dispensations ? See a most notable instance of this patience in Aaron, when his two sons, Nadab and Abihu, were destroyed by a most unparalleled judgment, and Moses brings him the sad tidings ; tidings, which we should expect would have caused him to break forth into some passionate complaint ; it is said, that “Aaron held his peace,” Lev. x. 3 ; he uttered not a

word—it was the Lord's doing ; and as it was wonderful, so it was just and righteous in his eyes.

Another work of patience under sufferings is self-resignation to the sovereign will of almighty God. It makes a christian renounce his own interests and concerns, and lay down his all, his designs, his hopes, all his possessions and enjoyments at the feet of God, desiring his wisdom to choose for him, and to carve him out that portion which he knows to be most fitting for him. Fretfulness and impatience do always proceed from self-love. When we are deeply engaged in an eager pursuit of that we desire, we are apt to storm when any cross providences interpose to defeat our expectations; for, whilst we set up ourselves as our highest and utmost end, and seek only our own temporal profit, we must needs take it impatiently, if anything fall out contrary to our hopes and desires. A cross lies very heavy, and is an insupportable load upon a selfish man. And he, that makes this world his all, must needs look upon himself as utterly ruined and undone, if God take from him that wherein he placeth his highest happiness; and therefore, no wonder if he break out into passionate and intemperate exclamations. But a truly patient soul puts a lower estimate upon these things ; he values them, indeed, as comforts ; otherwise there could be no trial, and so no patience in the loss of them : but he values them not as his chief, nor his only good ; he looks not upon himself as undone ; still he hath God, and Christ, and his grace left. And, as patience works the soul to a self-denying, so it does likewise to a submissive frame and temper. When it hath brought a man to renounce his own will, it then resolves him into the will of God ; it takes him out of his own hands, and puts him into God's. Here patience finds its footing in the deepest

waters of affliction: upon this ground it stands, and upon this it fixeth, "It is the will and good pleasure of my Father, that thus and thus it shall be with me; and, therefore, so be it." Indeed, christianity lies in conforming our wills to the will of God; that there should be but one will between God and us; and that this should be God's most wise and righteous will. The will of His precept he hath made known to us by his word; and to that we ought to submit our wills, by a cheerful performance of what he hath commanded. The will of His purpose, he makes known to us by his providence; and to that we ought humbly to submit, by a quiet bearing of whatsoever he shall see good to inflict. Art thou poor, or despised, or diseased, afflicted by God, or persecuted by men? set patience on work, and this will lighten thy burden, and ease thy troubled soul; by reflecting that it is the will of God to have it so, a patient christian wills that the will of God should take place and have its accomplishment. And indeed there is great reason he should do so; for he knows that the issue will be to his exceeding great advantage. And, therefore, if the Lord will, he dare not gainsay; but with a holy meekness, he surrenders up his will, as no longer his, but resolved into the will of his Father. Another important work of patience is, "the RECONCILING A MAN TO THE INSTRUMENTS OF HIS SUFFERINGS, to make him willing to forgive them himself, and to pray God for their pardon and forgiveness—who is far more offended by them than we can be.

Thus our Lord Jesus Christ, who is set forth to us in scripture as the great example of all grace, but more especially of this of patience, pours out his prayers for those who were pouring out his blood: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do," Luke xxiii.

34. Men, on the contrary, even christians, when they are wronged, are bitter and resentful, and "shoot out their arrows, even bitter words," Psalm lxiv. 3. They nourish an implacable hatred in their hearts against all whom they apprehend to have been the causes of those wrongs and sufferings which they undergo. Now what doth this prove, but that we look not at God in our sufferings? We eye not His hand, nor his providence in bringing them upon us; we consider not that their malice is overruled by his wisdom, and that he makes use of it to accomplish his own purposes and designs; and so, while, like dogs, we bite and snarl at the stones that are thrown at us we do in fact but fly at Him that casts them. Whereas, a truly patient spirit looks above and beyond the wickedness and malice of men, to the justice and wisdom of God; and this suppresses the ebullitions of his passions and all attempts at revenge, which else his wrath and corrupt nature would prompt him to take.

The last work of patience, that I would mention, is to obstruct all unlawful ways of deliverance from those sufferings under which we lie. Patience will not suffer a christian to accept of deliverance, if he cannot keep his conscience without stain, as well as his outward man from trouble; he will not make such an unworthy exchange as to leave his conscience to suffer in its stead; no, rather let bonds and afflictions, reproach and death, do their worst, than that he should hazard his soul, to save his skin; if he cannot break through a sad entangling providence but by breaking a command, let the worst come that can come, he keeps his station, and will not move one foot without the compass of the word, though he might thereby escape all his sorrows and sufferings. This patience it was that made the holy martyrs (Heb. xi.) generously scorn to accept deliverance, when it was

tendered to them upon unworthy terms ; they were not so stupid, nor so profuse of their lives, as to cast them away, could they have both saved them and their religion too, but, when the condition of their temporal safety was their eternal destruction, when they could no longer live here unless they consented to die for ever, welcome then death, and torments, the rack and the fire.

And thus you see what is the proper work of a christian's patience. It is to quiet and compose the spirits of the afflicted—to put a stop to all immoderate and murmuring complaints—to make us willingly resign up ourselves to the sovereign will and disposal of God—to render us placable and reconcilable to the instruments of our sufferings, and lastly, to prevent all unlawful ways of deliverance.

LXXXVIII. Grace does not steel the faithful heart,
That it should know no ill ;
We learn to kiss the chast'ning rod,
And feel its sharpness still.

The christian would not have his lot
Be other than it is ;
For, while his Father rules the world,
He knows that world is his.

He knows that He who gave the best,
Will give him all beside ;
Assur'd that ev'ry good he asks
Is evil, if denied.

When clouds of sorrow gather round,
His bosom owns no fear :
He knows, where'er his portion be,
His God will still be there.

And when the threaten'd storm is burst,
Whate'er the trial be,
Something yet whispers him within,
"Be still, for it is He!"

Poor nature, ever weak, will shrink
From the afflictive stroke;
But faith disclaims the hasty plaint,
Impatient nature spoke.

He knows it is his Father's will,
And therefore it is good,
Nor would he venture, by a wish,
To change it if he could.

His grateful bosom quickly learns
Its sorrows to disown;
Yields to his pleasure, and forgets
The choice was not his own.

LXXXIX. The wheels of this world sometimes run very cross, not only to the expectation of God's people, but to their sensible interests; for, contrary to what is their true and real interest they cannot run, Rom. viii. 28. All things must be theirs, that will conduce to their real good, profit, and advantage. But God's dispensations to them in this life are sometimes very afflictive, very ungrateful to sense. Now what a relief is it to the child of God to be assured of this, to be rooted and confirmed in this, that there is a Divine providence extending itself to all the motions and actions of creatures—to all the suspensions, omissions, and cessations of creatures' actions. Hence follow divers things which may be of great relief to us under our disquietudes, when we consider, that all things that work contrary to our expectation are things ordered by

Providence! It is wonderful how great an affliction this thing is even to persons of a more thoughtful and reflective mind, who do not receive this doctrine. They suppose, if such or such a thing had been done, such an event would not have happened;—yet was not the hand of God in it? Had the providence of God no influence upon the omission of such means as were omitted, or the use of such things as thou conceivest were pernicious? It is true, if we have knowingly or wilfully omitted probable means, we have cause for some reflection; yet even in that case the providence of God, reaching to all events, should be some relief to us. In this sense it is no blasphemy to say, God often deceiveth the physician, that is, suffereth him to err under false apprehension. There is not an omission that Providence hath not influenced, not a cessation of one usual action in a natural agent—not a contrary operation of it, but the providence of God hath influenced it.

If the providence of God influences all events, and that too by effecting them, if not sinful, they must, as to the people of God, be good, and for good, and the products both of infinite wisdom, and of infinite goodness. It is our unhappiness that we judge of events in this world by sense, and not by faith. This makes us call many things evil; indeed there is nothing can happen to a christian truly evil, for the hand of his Father must be in it; and never did a good father knowingly mix a potion of poison for his child, and with his own hand give it him to drink. We do not ask evil of God; and He that heareth our prayers, will not “when we ask him bread give us a stone, nor when we ask him a fish, give us a scorpion. If we that are evil, know how to give good things to those that ask them of us, much more shall our heavenly Father know how

to give good things to his children, asking them of him." In this we may be secure. If the providence of God influences all the events of the world, he so regulates them, that although they may prove to sense joyless and afflictive, yet they shall never prove real evils to those that fear God; but, in the issue, appear the products, not only of infinite wisdom, but also of infinite goodness. Thus far the doctrine of Divine providence is a fountain of consolation to the people of God.

Let us inquire then what duty we may conclude from hence—and that is very much. I shall instance some few particulars.

1. Is there a Divine Providence?—and doth this influence all events? Let us learn then the necessity of faith, to commit all our ways to God—to trust solely in him, and depend upon him. It is a duty we are often called to in scripture, and that with respect to our persons, our affairs, and our ways. "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls unto Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator," 1 Peter iv. 19. Our Saviour presseth it in opposition to two things. The fear of man:—"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him, which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell," Matt. x. 28. Again, he presseth it in opposition to too great solicitude: "Therefore, I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on," Matt. vi. 25. This he presseth from God's providence, for the lilies, the birds, &c., ver. 26—31.

With respect to our own private affairs, and the

events of things in the world, so far as they concern us, the Psalmist bids us "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee," Psalm lv. 22. "Trust in the Lord, and do good," Psalm xxxvii. 3. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass," ver. 5. "Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established," Prov. xvi. 3. Man troubleth himself in vain, both with care and fear—the child of God especially: we will not let God rule and govern the world. But surely, if there is a God in the world, an eternal, unchangeable, almighty God, infinitely wise, and most merciful, that filleth all places, that never slumbereth nor sleepeth, seeing and hearing all things; and this God infinitely active, influencing all beings, all motions and actions of beings: and if He hath any children, people, or servants in the world, whom he loveth, delighteth in, and careth for, surely these people may trust Him, and commit themselves and their ways to Him. Who may trust God?—Who may commit their ways to him, if they should not? Let them therefore, say with David, "O Israel, trust thou in the Lord; O house of Aaron, trust thou in the Lord; ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord." Be not over anxious, be not sinfully afraid as to any events. There is a God that ruleth in the earth, that overseeth the world. But this trusting in God must be in doing good, our souls must be committed to the Lord in well doing, 1 Pet. iv. 19. His promise to his people is, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways," Psalm xci. 11. But then "thy ways must be his ways." There is no trusting in the Lord, without walking in his way. The unholy-walking man hath no foundation to trust God for any good, he hath no promise to

ground his trust upon. And we must, notwithstanding the providence of God, trust in the use of proper means. The reason for this is because the precept commands the use of lawful means. Trusting God is indeed exclusive of the use of means, but it always includes the use of means that are proper and lawful, Isaiah xlv. 11, 12, 19. To refuse proper and lawful means, and talk of trusting God, is to tempt him, not to trust him. It includes also the use of religious means,—such as the waiting upon God in the use of his ordinances, the word, sacraments, and prayer. “For these things, saith God, I will be inquired of by the house of Israel.” Prayer is a general means instituted by God for the obtaining of any mercy. But I say, supposing these three things, that a child of God keeps in the Lord’s way, and has used all proper means for an event which he has desired, and sought the Lord for it by prayer. This doctrine of a Divine providence shows him the highest reason imaginable for his committing both his person and his ways to God, without any anxious solicitude, or distracting fears; because, “He is the Lord, that careth for us, therefore, we should cast **ALL** our care on him,” 1 Peter v. 7.

2. A second thing which is our duty, and consequent to this doctrine of Divine providence, is, a pious security in all states and conditions, with respect to all events. There is a sinful security which all christians ought to avoid. Security, is the freedom of the mind from all carking care, as to this or that thing. Now it is sinful, when the ground of it is some carnal confidence,—a relying upon some arm of flesh. There is a curse attached to it, as the prophet says, Jer. xvii. 5. Thus the Jews were often secure upon the view of their great allies, Assyria and Egypt. In like manner, people may

be secure on account of the power or favor of men. We are commanded "to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils," Isaiah ii. 22. It is sinful too, when there is a pretended confidence in God, but not conjoined with a holy walking. Take heed of such a security as this. That, which is christian security, is the fruit of a confidence in God. When the minds of his people are upon the view of a Divine providence, calm, and free from distractions and over-anxiety as to the event of things. This, I say, is every christian's duty ; and if there be such a Divine providence, it is the most reasonable thing in the world. God is the highest rational agent, and must work for some ends, and those the best. The great end is His own glory, the subordinate end is the good of his people. Now then if he hath in his working an influence upon all events, certainly that christian that loves and fears God, has all imaginable reason to sit down quiet, and be secure : God sees all things, and his hand is upon and in all things—he has his own end in view, and a power to turn all things, and to make them serve his ends. Therefore, in the darkest day we may trust in Him. We have at all times reason "to rejoice in the Lord, and again to rejoice." What then mean the disquietments—the anxieties—the confusion of our thoughts ? Are they not tacit denials or suspicions of the workings of Divine providence ? Are they not indications of our weak faith ? Certainly, if we had "faith as a grain of mustard seed," we should "trust still in God, and praise him."

3. A third duty, which this doctrine of Divine providence will evidence as reasonable for us, is a patient waiting for God under all the displeasing varieties of this life. A duty, which in scripture you will find called for by God, and by his servants, who have

spoken in his name, Psalm xxvii. 14; Psalm xxxvii. 7, 34; Prov. xx. 22; Hosea xii. 6; and also as often resolved upon by the servants of God, Job xiv. 14; Psalm xxv. 21; Psalm lii. 9, and in many other places; and there are many excellent promises that are made to it, Psalm xxxvii. 9; Isaiah xlix. 23. It excludes all murmuring, repining, and discontent at any of God's dealings—all uses of unlawful means to help ourselves: it is an habit of grace, which in the midst of the most adverse and afflictive providences teaches us to "stand still, and see the salvation of God." It keeps a christian in his station—in the paths of holiness, under the most cross and thwarting providences—in the most dark and gloomy days, and the greatest confusion we see in the world, or in our own circumstances. The failure of this is like the starting of the ballast in a ship in a storm; every ship that goeth to sea hath a ballast of stones, or some weighty substance, which keeps it even upon the waters; if in a storm the ballast start so that it be thrown on one side and give not a just poise to the ship, there is great danger of a wreck, the ship presently lies on one side. Active patience, or waiting for God in a storm of providence, is that which keepeth the soul poised; if this ballast start, there is great danger of the soul's being overwhelmed. Now this doctrine of Providence, extending to all events of our lives, shows the reasonableness of this patient waiting. Does a storm, a whirlwind, an hurricane overtake us, it lets us know that God is in that storm—God is in that whirlwind—that hurricane is not without the Lord, and God is not out of it. If the enemies of God's people could raise a storm without the Lord, or when they have raised it, could shut God out of the government of it, it were something: but they can do none

of this ; we know the malice of their natures, and their designs, and might fear them, had we not confidence in God, and in a patient waiting for him. Let this then influence our souls to look for God, while "he hideth himself from the house of Jacob." It is good to wait upon God ; for none yet that ever waited for God, returned ashamed. Besides it is our duty to do so, He is a great sovereign, He requires this homage from our souls.

4. Fourthly, this doctrine of a Divine providence, shows the reasonableness of a passive patience, or submission to, and contentment with our lot and portion in this world, under the most afflictive and adverse issues. Nothing comes to pass without the will of God. It is true, while we are here, we walk in the midst of briars and thorns—we are subject to a thousand accidents, afflictions in our bodies—troubles in our spirits—crosses in our relations—and in our affairs in the world ; but it is the great effect of faith, to make us "glory in tribulations." And if this doctrine of a Divine providence, doth not show us a sufficient ground "to glory in tribulations," which is an exercise of grace, most proper in such a state ; yet surely the consideration that God influences all events, sheweth us a great reason why we should be submissive ; possessing our souls with patience under the most afflictive contingencies of this life. Is affliction come upon thee ? Are crosses in thy estate—thy relations—come upon thee ? Think not that any of them came upon thee without God, either willing them or influencing them—ordering the causes of them. Now if we do but look upon His wisdom and infinite goodness ; if we do but look upon him as our Father ; if we do but believe that nothing can seem to God good to bring upon his people,

but what is really and truly for their good—he cannot but give good things, dispense and deal out good things unto his children. Is not this reason enough to submit yourselves unto God under his severest dispensations?

This doctrine of providence lets us see the more especial necessity of solemn and urgent prayer upon more especial emergencies; when we have more eminent and high concerns upon some special undertakings, or when some imminent danger threatens us. This doth more particularly oblige us to be more earnest and importunate with God. It is the precept of the wise man, “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths,” Prov. iii. 6. And accordingly, it hath been the practice of the people of God, as you see throughout holy writ; and it is the practice of his people still. Now this doctrine justifieth this practice of the people of God as a very reasonable practice of all those that have any knowledge of God, or any desire to maintain fellowship and communion with him.

And, lastly, as it evinces the duty and reasonableness both of daily, and of solemn, and extraordinary prayer, so it evinces also the duty, of daily, and more solemn, and extraordinary praises. We have not a good thing happens to us, but there is the hand of God in it. It may be some created being hath been the instrument to bring it to our hand; but the action or motion of that created being has been influenced by God. The event or issue hath been ordered, governed, and directed by God: the hand of God is in every day’s health and protection, in every night’s sleep and preservation. But this is obvious to every christian, of how mean a capacity soever.

Learn then in all extremities to trust the Lord, and

not man, for God is an everlasting refuge ; "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help ;" that which they can do for you is but for this life at most. Is it not then better to trust in Him, who is able to defend you to all eternity ? For He that made heaven and earth, continues for ever. This use the Psalmist makes of it : "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations," Psalm xc. 1, as if he should say, Lord thou hast been a refuge to the church, thou wast so in Abraham's time—in Pharaoh's time. Consider, that God is a refuge to his people not only from generation to generation, but from everlasting to everlasting. "Trust in him at all times ; ye people, pour out your heart before him : God is a refuge for us. Selah," Psalm lxii. 8.

XC. Far beyond all comprehension
 Is Jehovah's cov'nant love ;
 Who can fathom its dimension,
 Or its unknown limits prove ?

Ere the earth upon its basis,
 By creating pow'r was built,
 His designs were good and gracious,
 For removing human guilt.

Nought foreseen thy love excited,
 Faith, or good desires in me ;
 But, because thy grace delighted
 To be sovereign and free.

Freely thou wilt bring to heaven
 All thy chosen ransom'd race ;
 Who to thee, their head, we're given,
 In the covenant of grace.

XCI. Sometimes God makes his people wait so long, that their eyes even fail in waiting, that is, their faith, hope, and patience are almost spent, and they are ready to give over looking out for deliverance. Two things make our waiting tedious:—the sharpness of afflictions, and the length of them; long delays of help, and great troubles in the mean time:—the depth of the calamity, or the sharpness of the trial may occasion this failing. “My heart panteth, my strength faileth me; as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me,” Psalm xxxviii. 10. The length of troubles or the protraction of deliverance may occasion this. As the bodily eye is tired with long looking, so doth the soul begin to be weary, when this expectation is drawn out at length: “Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?” The delay gives rise to despondency. The sufferings of God’s children may be sometimes long: God ordereth it so, that faith, hope, and patience may have their perfect work: “That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises,” Heb. vi. 12; pointing out the means whereby God’s people inherit the promises. There is an intervening time between the promise and the accomplishment. Intervening difficulties to be overcome: “knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience,” James i. 3. The apostle says, “Hope, that is seen, is not hope,” Rom. viii. 24. Those, that have received a great measure of faith, have a great measure of trials; their troubles are greater, that their graces may be the more exercised—that many stubborn tempers may be broken. God useth to suffer the enemies of his people to break up their fallow ground, that they “sow not among thorns,” Jer. iv. 3. “The ploughers ploughed upon my back; they made long fur-

rows," Psalm cxxix. 3. We have proud and stiff hearts, therefore the plough of persecution must needs go deep, that the seed of the word may sink in deeper, and thrive the more; when the showers of grace have fallen upon it, and the Sun of Righteousness hath shone thereon, then the Lord of the soil will receive a richer crop. Thus the power of the Spirit is more seen. "Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience, and longsuffering, with joyfulness," Col. i. 11. Not only patience, but also longsuffering, which is patience extended under continued troubles. Some can endure a sharp brunt of sufferings, but tire under long affliction: some go drooping and heavily under it, while others are enabled to "count it all joy, while they fall into divers temptations," James i. 2. It is for these and many other reasons, that God doth permit our sufferings to be long. The strongest believer may faint in trouble, therefore it should be their comfort to know that God will not try them above their strength, 1 Cor. x. 13. Either he will give more grace, or else he will abate the power of the temptation. Grace is not so perfect in any of God's children as to be above all weakening by assaults. Who would have thought that a meek Moses would have been angry? Psalm cxi. 33; there are remains of sin unmortified, such as may be awakened in the most advanced christians. Moreover temptations raise strange clouds and mists in the soul, so that though the child of God can admit principles, yet he cannot reconcile providences with them: "Righteous art thou, O Lord, yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments," Jer. xii. 1. It is not to be questioned, nay not even doubted of, that God is upright and just in all his dealings; yet we often cannot discover what mean those passages of his providence.

Our thoughts are strangely confused, our minds are overset. "Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue, when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he," Hab. i. 13. They wonder that God can bear with the enemy in their treachery and violence against his church and people. They know not how to reconcile His dispensations with his nature and attributes; though they have faith enough to justify God, yet is there still remains of unbelief to question his providence, when the heart is overcharged with fears. "Truly God is good to Israel, but my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped," Psalm lxxiii. 1, 2. They hold fast the conclusion that "God is good to Israel." Our affections too are impetuous and hasty, and if God give us not present satisfaction, we question his love and care of us: "I said in my haste, I am cut off," Psalm xxxi. 22; "I am cast out of thy sight," Jonah ii. 4. So that if God confute not our unbelief by some sudden experience, or the word contain not a suitable supply, or the principle of grace in some measure withstand, the soul is ready to be swallowed up in the whirlpool of despair. Thus precipitate are we while we listen to the voice of the flesh; we are apt to count all our troubles, God's total desertion of us. Such an hasty principle have we within us, that will hurry us to desperate conclusions, as if it were in vain to wait for God any longer. What a warmth of faith and zeal have we at first! We lose, after a time, our first love, so our first faith. "Ye did run well, who did binder you?" Gal. v. 7. There is a great forwardness at first, which abateth afterwards: men grow remiss, and "faint in their minds" from one degree to another. This failing is but an infirmity of God's people; though their hope

be weak and ready to faint, it never dies. It is an infirmity of the better sort, not like the atheism and malignity of the ungodly. This distemper is not incidental to carnal men: "Mine eyes fail with looking up," Psalm xxxviii. 14. It argues a vehemency in our hope; they, that mind not spiritual things, are never troubled with such a spiritual disease; for this failing cannot be but where there is vehemency of desire and expectation. The world feel none of this, for there is a difference between them and others; though God's people have their weaknesses, yet their faith doth not quite expire—they are weary of watching, but they do not give up waiting. Fainting is one thing, and death is another; they strive against the temptation, though no end of their difficulties may appear, they wait still—keep looking upwards, though the vigour of the eye be abated by long exercise. There is life in them, though not that liveliness they themselves could wish. They do not fall to rise no more, nor are they quite overthrown by the blast of temptation. They confess their weakness to God, take shame to themselves, and beg new strength. It is an excellent way to cure such distempers, to lay them forth before God in prayer; for he helpeth the weak in their conflicts. When we debate dark cases with our own hearts, we entangle ourselves the more.

This should reprove our despondency and impatience, when we cannot bear a little while; Christ reproached his disciples, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" Matt. xxvi. 40. With some their whole voyage is through storms: Christ bids us take up our cross daily, Luke ix. 23. Some are kept all their life long under this discipline;—and shall we bear no check from Providence? We would have all done in an hour or

in a year ; we can bear nothing when God calleth us to bear much and long. Beware, lest if we cannot abate a little of our wonted comfort, God should strip us of all. Let us look for longsufferings : we need much grace, because we know not how long our great troubles may last. Sufferings are like to be long when the cross maketh little improvement—carrieth little conviction with it. While the stubbornness of the child continues, the blows are continued. God will withdraw himself till his people "acknowledge their offence," Hosea v. 15. When we eye instruments, and pour out our rage upon them, or look for deliverance when we repent not ; when provocations are long, then will it happen to us as to the children of Israel : "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD ; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance," Deut. xxviii. 58, 59.

XII. God doth sometimes bring such trials and afflictions on his people, as shall hold them all their days, and scarce afford them any intermission ; and, if it prove so with thee, O Christian, know that thy patience ought to run parallel with thy trouble. If God will not take thy burden off, but make thee travel with it till the evening, till thou liest down to take thy rest in the grave, thy patience must hold out till then, if thou wouldest have it perfect. Look then, upon thyself as a traveller ; make account that, whatsoever burden God is pleased to lay upon thee, he may perhaps not take it off till thou come to the end of thy journey. If he discharge thee of it sooner, acknowledge his mercy ;

but be sure thou discharge not thy patience, before God discharge thy burden. Sometimes our sorrows are very deep—our burdens very heavy; and God brings upon us not only long, but sharp sufferings; he may give thee a deep draught of the bitter cup, and squeeze into it the very quintessence of gall and wormwood. Now, in this case, thy patience must be strong, as well as lasting. But, “if thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small,” Prov. xxiv. 10. Thou must suffer too, and not repine; otherwise thy patience is only extorted; thou must thank and bless that God, taking from thee whom thou didst bless giving to thee.

The motives to patience are many and powerful; and such, indeed, they had need be, to persuade our fretful natures, to the exercise of so hard a grace. There are none of us, who at all reflect upon the working of our own spirits, but find it a difficult matter to keep down the risings of our unruly passions. When a cross providence intervenes, either to frustrate our expectations, or deprive us of our present enjoyments, they will rebel; so that it is almost as easy an undertaking to persuade the sea into a calm, when winds and storms beat boisterously upon it, as it is to compose the minds of men into an equal temper, when they are assaulted with any cross providences. Yet grace can work those wonders, which nature cannot: and that God, to whom all things are possible, can make our hearts calm, when our outward condition is tempestuous; and though he lets forth his winds upon us, can keep us from being ruffled by them; and lay the same command upon our passions, as Christ did upon the waves, “Peace, be still.” There is nothing more necessary for a christian, in the whole conduct of his life, than the work and exercise of patience. What saith the apostle? “Ye have need of

patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise," Heb. x. 36. It is a most necessary grace for a christian, not only as all other graces are necessary to make him such, but the apostle speaks of it by way of special remark, "Ye have need of patience," need of the continual exercise, strength, and perfection of this grace. Our whole life is but a scene of sorrows and troubles. They spring up thick about us, and surround us in every condition: in whatever state of life thou mayest be, still thou shalt find something to molest and disquiet thee, for our rest is not here. Who can recount the personal, domestic, or more public sorrows, which he undergoes? as if breath were only given to us to spend it in sighs and groans. The truth is, we pass through the world as men that run the gauntlet, and must receive a lash at every step we take, Job v. 7. Trouble is man's inheritance, it descends to him from his father Adam; entailed upon him by the curse of the law annexed to our first transgression: our troubles come upon us naturally and spontaneously. Now, if sufferings do thus make up the greatest part of our lives, is it not absolutely necessary to fortify our hearts with patience—quietly and meekly to bear whatsoever it shall seem good to the all-wise providence of God to inflict upon us? Afflictions are necessary for us; more necessary and more advantageous than prosperity; to arouse our sloth, and awaken our security; to make us remember God and ourselves. And shall afflictions be thus necessary for us, and shall we not have patience to undergo them? While thou livest in this world, thou sailest upon a rough sea: the waves rise high; and wilt thou expose thyself to these storms, like a forlorn vessel without ballast to be tossed up and down, ready to be swallowed up every moment, or

dashed against every rock in thy way? Patience too lightens the afflictions we suffer. The same burden shall not, by this means, have the same weight in it. There is a certain skill in taking up our load upon us, to make it sit easy; whereas, others that take it up unmercifully find it most oppressive; let the same affliction befall two persons; the one a patient, meek, self-resigning soul; the other a proud, fretful one, that repines and murmurs at every cross, and every disappointment; and with how much more ease shall the one bear it than the other! the burden is the very same, but with the one it doth not wring nor pinch him, but the other's impatience hath galled him, and every burden is more intolerable to him, because it lies upon a raw and sore spirit. And therefore, since sufferings are unavoidable in this life, which is a vale of tears and misery, if thou wouldest make thy sufferings supportable, fret not thyself at any dispensation of the Divine Providence; and whatsoever burden it shall please God to lay upon thee, add not to it by thy impatience; be not ingenious to torment thyself by thy own troublesome thoughts and reflections, nor to find out circumstances to aggravate thy sufferings; swallow down the bitter draught that God has put into thy hand, for so the trouble will be sooner over and less distasteful. It is not so much the wearing, as the striving with our yoke, that wrings and galls us; and, as it is with beasts caught in a snare, so it is with impatient men; the more they struggle, the faster they draw the knot, make their sufferings the greater, and their escape impossible. But patience gives the soul some liberty under afflictions; the christian may be "troubled on every side, but yet he is not distressed." He is God's prisoner; and though the afflictions come very close to his outward man and his temporal comfort, it can never eat

into his spirit ; in this sense, “the iron enters not into his soul.” Possibly thou eyest only the instruments of thy sufferings—their disengenuous, unworthy and spiteful way of proceeding, some even “requiting evil for good,” Jer. xviii. 20. Thy impatience may take advantage to fret and torment thee ; but, if thou wouldest look up to the principal cause, thou wouldest find abundant reason meekly to submit ; for it is the hand and dispensation of God. There are many things in this reflection that should quiet our minds, under all the trials which we are exercised with. Consider that, God is the absolute and uncontrollable sovereign of the world. He doth whatsoever pleaseth him, in heaven, and earth, and with all things ; “and none can stay his hand or say unto him, what doest thou ?” Dan. iv. 35. “It is in vain to strive with him ; for he giveth not account of any of his matters,” Job xxxiii. 13. And wilt thou, O arrogant man, dispute with Him, why he hath so formed thee, or why he thus breaks thee ? Satisfy thyself, that, it is fit and reasonable that it should be with thee as it is ; for so is the sovereign will of God ; and his will, being the first and supreme cause, must needs be the highest reason in the world. Canst thou contend with the Almighty ; or wrest either His sceptre or rod out of his hand ? If not, what folly and madness is it, to vex and fret thyself at the accomplishment of that will upon thee, which never was, never can be frustrated. We may impotently wish this or that to come to pass ; but alas ! where is our power to effect it ? Shall thy designs give laws to His purposes ? or will the course of second causes stoop to thy appointment, or run according to thy will ? It will only be our torture to struggle, when it is not in our power to dispose. And know, that thou dost insolently invade the prerogative

of the Almighty, when thou repinest at any of his dispensations; for it shows a rebellious will in thee to rescind his decrees, and disturb the order of his administration of affairs. Consider that, God is not only our sovereign, but he is our proprietor. All our comforts and enjoyments, yea, our very selves, are infinitely more God's, than they are ours: he hath but lent them to us for our present use, but the title and property are still his own. And what hath busy man to do, to intermeddle with what is not his own? Thy children, thy estate, thy liberty, thy health, yea thy life itself, whatever is dearest to thee, and most prized by thee, are not so much thine, as God's. What presumption then is it to prescribe unto Him, or to murmur against him, for disposing as he pleaseth, of what so entirely belongs to him! May He not do what he will with his own? Certainly, this consideration alone, were it well wrought into our hearts, should be sufficient to allay all our impatience, and silence all repining thoughts. That, since all is God's, we ought rather to bless him, and gratefully acknowledge his goodness, that he hath spared us any comforts so long, than to complain of his severity, that he is pleased to call for them again from us, and to require again what he only lent, but never alienated.

Is it not an infinitely wise God that afflicts thee? and therefore, thou mayest well acquiesce in his providences. If afflictions did only befall us by blind chance, if they were merely casual and contingent, without any intelligent nature to overrule and guide them, we might possibly give vent to our impatience, by exclaiming against illhap and bad fortune; and it would be, if not more reasonable, yet at least, less impious: but, when all events are eternally scanned and premeditated—when

Infinite Wisdom hath maturely deliberated every minute circumstance of our lives—when there is not the least dust that falls into our eye, but Infinite Wisdom foresaw and consulted about it, whether it should so fall out or no, infinite ages before the foundations of the world were laid—it is very foolish, as well as very wicked, for us blind men, to find fault with the conduct of Divine wisdom and foreknowledge. All thy sorrows and sufferings are chosen out for thee by that God who doth inflict them. He is a wise physician, that knows what ingredients, and what quantities of each are fittest for thee to take, and will so temper them, both for measure and time, as shall be most proper and healthful for thee. And if He prescribe thee a large and bitter draught, quiet the tumults of thy passions with this consideration, that it was his infinite skill that directed him so to do. Possibly He intends thee the greatest mercy, when he brings the sorest trials upon thee; and by pruning and lopping thee, designs only that thou shalt grow more stately and beautiful. His wisdom often so manageth our affairs as to bring good out of evil, light out of darkness, and life itself out of death; and that, of which at present we cannot conceive otherwise, but that it tends to our utter ruin, proves afterwards the only means of our safety and preservation. And therefore, since we ourselves are so infinitely foolish, and God so infinitely wise, we may well, with patience and thankfulness, give up the disposal and government of ourselves unto Him; for, believe it, if God should model his providences according to our methods and contrivances, he need take no other way to curse and ruin us.

Consider, God is a faithful God. He is faithful to his word and promise, which he certainly will fulfil in his

due and appointed season. Now as there is no condition that needs more, so there is no condition that hath more promises made to it, than an afflicted and suffering condition.

He hath promised to moderate all our afflictions, 1 Cor. x. 13. He will proportion our burden to our strength.

He hath promised his presence with, and his comforts and assistance to the afflicted, Isaiah xliii. 2. And certainly, the presence and the consolations of God are such as can sweeten the most bitter condition, and make the waters of Marah pleasant and refreshing.

He hath promised to rescue thee out of all thy dangers, and to deliver thee out of all thy sorrows and troubles, Job v. 19.

He hath made thee that universal promise which shines above all the rest, as the sun in the firmament, and were enough, if there was no other besides, to give light and comfort to a believing soul under the saddest circumstances, that all our sorrows and sufferings shall, in the end, turn out to our advantage, Rom. viii. 28. What folly then is it to complain of our afflictions, when our afflictions are our great advantages ! And could we, with a wish, change our condition and make it such as we desire, yet it would be far worse with us than it is now. Look then unto God, the great Guide and Governor of all things. Consider His sovereignty, His wisdom, His fatherly mercy, and His faithfulness ; and if impatience have not taunted thy very reason, thou wilt find abundant cause to bear all thy burdens, not only with submission, but with thankfulness. To this, let me add one more consideration concerning God ; and that is, He is a “God of patience,” Rom. xv. 5. And that, not only as he is the God that requires patience from us—not only

as he is the God that gives patience to us—not only as he is the God that doth own and crown patience in us, but as he is the God that doth exercise infinite patience towards us. He bears more from us than we can possibly bear from Him. He bears our sins, whereas, we only bear his chastisements ; and sin is infinitely more contrary to God's nature, than suffering can be to ours. And how strange is it when we daily offer many horrid affronts against his Divine majesty, and yet expect that He should pass them by with patience ; that we should murmur and fret, and cannot quietly bear the least correction from the hand of God !

Consider what thou hast deserved, and this will be a most unanswerable reason for patience under what thou feelest ; if God would extract the very spirit out of all the most bitter things in the world, and put this potion into thy cup, and make thee drink of it all thy days, yet, all this is nothing to what thou hast deserved. When thou liest under any misery or affliction, think with thyself, “this is nothing to one pang of hell-torments, much less to an eternity of them. If I now feel so much pain when I am but a little touched with his finger ; oh ! what an intolerable anguish should I have felt had I now lain under the furious strokes of His almighty arm ! And shall I fret and be impatient, when I have infinitely more reason to bless God that it is no worse with me than it is to complain.” Compare your sorrows with your deserts, and this will be a most effectual means to excite you to a patient bearing of them. It is true that afflictions, in themselves considered, can have no great encomiums made of them ; for so, they are rather pernicious, than any way conducive to the welfare of those that suffer them ; that man must have worn off all impressions of natural good and evil,

who shall think that sorrows are but delights and recreations; after all the grave dictates of philosophy, pains will be pains still; and if reason should presume to teach sense what is pleasant and what is grievous, it would exceed its due bounds; it is work enough for patience to bear them as they are: it is not required that we should account them pleasures. But, though afflictions be in themselves evils, yet they are capable of such excellent improvements, that the good which shall spring from them, will more than compensate the pain and grief of our present sufferings. To this agrees that of the apostle: "No chastisement for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby," Heb. xii. 11. As the ploughing up of a field seems utterly to destroy the beauty of it, when its smoothness and verdure are turned into rough and unsightly furrows, and all its herbs and flowers buried under deformed clods of earth; but yet, afterwards, in the days of harvest, when the fields laugh and sing for joy, when the furrows stand thick with corn, and look like a boundless sea of plenty, they yield an incomparable delight to the eyes of the beholders; so, when God ploughs up any of his children, it may, possibly, seem a somewhat strange method of his husbandry, thus to deform the flourishing of their present condition; but yet, afterwards, when the seed which he casts into these furrows is sprung up; when it shall overspread their souls, and shake like Lebanon, both the wisdom and goodness of Divine Providence will be made apparent, in thus converting a barren prosperity into a more fruitful adversity; and therefore, since afflictions may be thus improved to so great an advantage, impatience

and fretfulness under them may be justly censured, not only as impiety, but folly.

Now there are four sorts of improvements, that we may make of our afflictions,

1. As they are the exercise of our graces, so they keep them lively and active. Exercise, you know, though it tire the body for the present, yet conduces to its health and soundness. Now afflictions are the soul's exercise, by which God keeps our graces in breath, which else would languish. And, though this exercise may sometimes be very violent, so as to make the soul pant, yet this tends to better its constitution, and to remove that which otherwise would obstruct and oppress it. And, therefore, O christian, whatever thy present troubles be, know that God brings them upon thee only to exercise thy graces. Possibly, He takes from thee all outward props and dependencies, to try thy faith, whether it can lean firmly upon a naked promise, and be confident enough to take his word. Possibly, he lets loose all his winds and waves upon thee ; and all this, only to try the temper of thy hope, whether that anchor be strong enough to hold out in a storm. Thus, I say, God often brings afflictions upon his people, that their faith may appear victorious, their hope steadfast, and their love sincere in the midst of troubles, dangers, and distresses. As spices send forth their most fragrant odours when they are most crushed ; so are the graces of God's people most sweet when they are bruised under the pressure of heavy afflictions ; and therefore, O christian, if thy afflictions put thee upon acting faith and hope, a generous disinterested love of God, self-denial, and humility, know that thou art a great gainer by thy very losses, and happy in thy greatest troubles.

2. Another advantage of afflictions is this, that they are physic to thy soul, and purge out corruptions; and, therefore, though the potion be bitter, yet, when it is administered to such an end, this should reconcile our antipathy, and make us swallow it down without repining.—See that notable place, Isaiah xxvii. 9, “By this, therefore, shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin.” And this afflictions do sometimes, by cutting off those provisions which a more prosperous condition laid in for the fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, when we cannot have such large supplies for those vanities and follies which before too much alienated our hearts from God. And this is the very reason why there is no place so holy as a sick-bed. Have you never known those who have been cast thereon, when their vessel hath sprung a plank, and death hath been leaking in on every side? Have you never observed how they have then wholly applied themselves to prayer, confession, and humiliation? They are deadened to all the joys and vanities of the world, and detest their own folly, for ever loving and prizing them. And so it is, proportionably, in all our afflictions that God brings upon us: they all tend to make us sober and considerative, for it is a natural impression upon the minds of men that all our sufferings are for sin; and this cannot but engage us against those sins, the smart of which we so sensibly feel; and having had such experience of the bitter effects of sin, we are afterwards made more capable of the counsel of our Saviour, to “sin no more, lest a worse thing befal us.”

3. A patient bearing of afflictions is a clear evidence of our adoption. Indeed, our sufferings only prove us to be the sons of Adam, on whom the curse is entailed through his primitive transgression; but our patience

under sufferings is a strong proof and evidence that we are the sons of God. The apostle makes this the trial of our legitimacy, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons ; if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons," Heb. xii. 7, 8. By affliction, He doth but set his mark upon thee ; and though it doth burn thee, yet this should be thy perpetual comfort, that, by this He will own thee, that thou mayest know thyself to be his. And now, O christian ! is there any affliction so grievous, as such an evidence is comfortable ? Will not this abundantly recompense the smart of all thy sufferings, when thy patience in bearing them shall give thee a testimony that thou art a child of God, and fill thy inward sense as full of joy as thy outward can be of trouble and sorrow, yea, joy that shall swallow up all the afflictions which thou feelest, and make them inconsiderable nothings ?

4. Consider, that a patient suffering of afflictions will make rich additions to the weight of thy crown of glory, 2 Cor. iv. 17. And wilt thou then, O christian, murmur and repine at the weight of thy burden, when at last it will be all found to be gems and diadems, and all to be thine own ? Methinks, this consideration alone should be so effectual to teach us patience, that we should scarce have patience to hear any more. Shall our glory superabound as our sorrows have abounded ? Shall our eternal refreshings be measured out unto us by the cup of afflictions which we have here drunk of ? Doth God beat and hammer us, only that he may make us vessels of honor ? Shall all sorrow and sighing fly away, and everlasting and immeasurable joy be upon our heads ? Wherefore then, O christian ! these impatient complaints —these fretful vexations ? Dost thou do well to be angry,

because God takes this course to make thee glorious ? Doth God do thee an injury to fit thee for a higher place in heaven, perhaps, than thou carest to possess ? Believe it, thou art the greatest enemy to thyself ; and if thou wouldest have thy good things in this world, thou dischargest God from his obligation ; thy impatience can free thee from no other weight but one, and that is, "the exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Thus, therefore, if we consider the great benefits and advantages that will accrue to us by a patient bearing of afflictions ; that it is exercise to our graces—physic for our souls—an evidence of our adoption, and an addition to our future glory, we should soon be convinced that it is much more our interest to be patient, than it is not to be afflicted.

XCIII. Yes, 'tis a rough and thorny road
That leads us to the saints' abode ;
But when our Father's house we gain,
'Twill make amends for all our pain.

And tho' we feel our present grief.
In hope we find a sweet relief ;
For hope anticipates the day,
When all our griefs shall pass away.

And what is all we suffer now,
Or all we can endure below,
To that bright day when Christ shall come,
And take his weary pilgrims home ?

" An evil heart of unbelief,"
Will then no more occasion grief ;
And base desires of flesh and mind
For ever will be left behind.

The world or lov'd or fear'd before,
Can charm or threaten them no more ;
And Satan baffled in his schemes,
Retires indignant, and blasphemes.

"Tis thus the Lord has fix'd a day
To wipe his people's tears away ;
Their toils, and griefs, and conflicts past,
He'll bring them to himself at last.

O ! happy state, where purest joy
For ever reigns without alloy ;
O ! happy saints, ordain'd to prove
The fulness of this joy above.

XCIV. God sees it necessary, sometimes, to exercise his people with much trouble : though they are highly in favor with God, yet have they a large share of sorrow. This is true, if you consider the people of God in their collective body and community, which is called the church. It is the church's name. " O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted," Isaiah liv. 11. Things are known and distinguished by their name ; tribulation is one of the waymarks to heaven, Acts xiv. 22,—as the way to Canaan lay through a howling wilderness. If we were told beforehand, that we should meet with such and such marks in our journey to such a place, if we found them not, we should have cause to suspect we were out of our way. From the beginning of the world, the church hath always been bred up under troubles, and inured to the discipline of the cross : " Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say," Psalm cxxix. 1. The spirit of hatred and enmity worked betimes. The first family that ever was in the world yielded Abel the protomartyr, and Cain the patriarch of unbelievers. While the

church kept in families, the outward estate of God's people was worse than that of their neighbours. Abraham was a sojourner, though owned and blessed by God, when the Canaanites were possessors and dwelled in walled towns. Jacob's family grew up by degrees into a nation, but Esau's presently multiplied into many dukes and princes. And as God's people grew up, they grew up in affliction. Egypt was a place of retreat for them for a while, but before they got out of it, it proved an house of bondage. Their deliverance brought them into a wilderness, where want made them murmur, but oftener wantonness. Then God sent fiery serpents, and afflicted them with other judgments. After forty years wandering in the wilderness, they are brought into Canaan, a land of rest; but it afforded them little peace, for they forfeited it almost as soon as they conquered it; it flowed with milk and honey, but that milk and honey was mixed with gall and wormwood. Their history, as it is delivered in the book of God, acquaints you with many varieties and intermixtures of providence, till wrath came upon them to the utmost; till God saw fit to enlarge the pale and lines of communication, by treating with other nations. And, since life and immortality were brought to light by the gospel, christians must not expect to be so tenderly brought up as never to see an evil day; he hath told us so, 2 Tim. iii. 12; and Rom. viii. 29, We must be conformed to our Head, and expect to pledge Christ in his bitter cup; and (1 Cor. xv. 19) our condition must teach us that our hopes are not in this world. In the gospel dispensation God would deal forth temporal blessings more sparingly, and spiritual with a fuller hand; the experience of all ages proves the truth of this. When the gospel began to spread into all lands, the pagans first perse-

cuted it, then the pseudo-christians ; the holiest and best people were maligned, and bound, and butchered, and racked, and stoned, but still they multiplied. It were easy to tire you with various examples in every age. They that went home to God, were those that "came out of great tribulation and washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," Rev. vii. 14. There is always something to try God's servants, and in these latter times the roaring lion is not grown more gentle and tame, but rather more fierce and severe : "For the devil is come down unto you having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time," Rev. xii. 12. As his kingdom beginneth to shake, so will he be most cruel for the supporting it. The apostle says "The whole creation groaneth," Rom. viii. 22. And God's children bear a part in the concert, they have their full share in the world's miseries ; and domestic crosses are common to them with other men of the world ; yea, their outward condition is often worse than others ; chaff and corn are thrashed on the same floor, but the corn only is ground in the mill, and baked in the oven. Jeremiah, God's prophet, was in the dungeon when Jerusalem was besieged. The world hateth God's people more than others, and God loveth them more than others ; and this he shows by chastening them, that they may not be "condemned with the world," 1 Cor. xi. 32. There is more care taken with the vine than the bramble, the one is cut and pruned, that it may bring forth more fruit, while the other is neglected and suffered to run wild. God seeth fit sometimes at first setting forth, (as the old Germans were wont to dip their children in the Rhine, to harden them), thus to season his children for their whole course ; they must bear their yoke from their youth, or

first acquaintance with God. In Heb. x. 32, it is called "a great fight of afflictions." Sometimes God lets them alone, while they are young in profession and experience, as Jacob drove the little ones as they were able to bear, Gen. xxxiii. 13. Sometimes God lets them alone till their latter time, and their season of fighting cometh not till they are ready to go out of the world, that they may die fighting, and be crowned in the field. But first or last the cross cometh, and there is a time to exercise our faith and patience, before we inherit the promises. God does this to weaken our pride—to reclaim us from our former wanderings—to increase grace—to make us mind heavenly things and sit loose to those of earth—to make us retreat to our great privileges, and to stir us up to prayer. Luther says, "tribulation is as needful for us as our life, nay more needful; and much more useful than the riches and honors of the whole world." We think that wealth is necessary for us—dignity and esteem are necessary for us:—no, affliction is necessary for us. 1 Pet. i. 6. "IF NEED BE, ye are in heaviness" &c. We ought to expect troubles and provide for them; we shall not always have a life of ease and peace, the times spoken of Acts ix. 31, will not always be our lot: "Then had the churches rest." Were it so we should gather rust and grow dead; therefore look for troubles and afflictions. If, because you are christians, you promise yourselves a long lease of temporal happiness, free from troubles and afflictions, it is as if a soldier going to the wars should expect peace and continual truce with the enemy; or, as if a mariner, committing himself to the sea for a long voyage, should look for nothing but fair weather, without winds and storms; so irrational is it for a christian to promise himself rest here on earth.

Let us learn then beforehand, how to be abased, and how to abound, Phil. iv. 12. He, that is on a journey to heaven, must be provided for all weathers; though it be sunshine when he sets forth, a storm will overtake him before he comes to his journey's end. It is good to be forearmed—sorrows will come, and we should prepare accordingly; we enter upon the profession of godliness, upon these terms, to be willing to suffer afflictions if the Lord see fit: and therefore we should gird up our minds to endure them, whether they come or no. God never intended that Isaac should be sacrificed, yet he would have Abraham lay the knife to his throat: sorrows foreseen leave not so sad an impression upon the spirit. The evil is more familiarized before it come: “For the thing which I feared is come upon me,” Job. iii. 25. When our fears prophesy we smart less, it allays the anguish, we meet with nothing but what we expected before. “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended,” (John xvi. 1) saith Christ. And when you are under affliction, “think it not strange,” any more than that night should follow day, or showers sunshine; as these things fall out in the course of nature, so do troubles and afflictions in the course of God’s providence: it were marvellous if it were otherwise. We do not wonder to see a shower of rain fall, or a cloudy day succeed a fair one. All God’s people are fellow-soldiers in this conflict, 1 Pet. v. 9. When we are out of affliction, let us bless God that we are out of affliction. The greatness of the trouble, danger, misery, straits, into which God casts his own, doth lay a greater obligation of thankfulness upon those that are free from such evils, for evils they are: if thou be not thankful for thy present health, go to the hospitals, look there upon the afflicted state of

God's people, and that may quicken thee to thankfulness for being freed from such suffering. Do not draw sufferings upon yourselves by your own rashness and folly. James bids us count it joy to be tried, chap. i. 2, but we must not seek or desire trouble, but bear it when God layeth it upon us. Christ hath himself taught us to pray "lead us not into temptation." It is folly then to cast ourselves upon it; if we draw hatred upon ourselves, and run headlong into dangers, without necessity, this will not be acceptable to God. If a man set his house on fire, he is amenable to the laws; if it be fired by others, or by an ill accident, he is pitied and relieved. We are to take up our own cross, when made to our hands by God's providence—not make it for ourselves, nor to fill our own cup, but drink it off if God put it into our hands. We must come honestly by our crosses as by our comforts, and must have a call for what we suffer, as well as for what we do, if we would have comfort in our sufferings. God's children have the feeling of nature as well as the ungodly. Christ Jesus to show the truth of our nature, would express our affections; he had his fears and tears, Heb. v. 7, and so legitimated our cares and sorrows. It is an innocent affection to dislike what is contrary to us—to our natural interests: to be without natural affection, is among the vices. The children of God are more sensible than others, because they have a reverence for every providence; they are anxious to observe when God striketh, and to be humble when God is angry. Unconverted men are not so affected, as Jeremiah says, "O Lord thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return," Jer. v. 3.

Yet even with God's children there is weakness, and a mixture of corruption, which may come from an impatience of the flesh, which would fain be at ease. "Rest is good," Gen xlix. 15. Therefore we are filled with anguish when troubled, either from distrust, or from inattention to the promises. There is often a negative distrust in the godly, not minding the promise, not regarding the grounds of comfort which it offereth to us: as, "They considered not the miracle of the loaves," Mark vi. 52. Again, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto you as unto children," Heb. xii. 5. Yea, sometimes there may be positive distrust, or actual refusing of comfort: "My soul refused to be comforted," Psalm lxxvii. 2. Outward sorrow and trouble may revive inward trouble. Affliction, in itself, is a part of the law's curse, and may revive something of bondage in the hearts of God's children; and it is good and useful as far as it quickeneth them to renew their reconciliation with God. If it humble them under the mighty hand of God, it is well; but, when it filleth them with rebellion and repining against God, or maketh them mourn as men without hope, it is evil. Let us observe then, how affliction worketh in us;—there is a double extreme, slighting the hand of God, or fainting under it, Heb. xii. 5;—we must beware of both. There must be a sense of afflictions, but it must be kept within bounds: without a sense of them there can be no improvement: to despise them, is to think that they come by chance. They come from God—their end is repentance—their cause is sin. God hath the whole guiding and ordering the affliction, and while the rod is in his hand there is no danger. He is a wise God, and cannot be overreached: He is a God of judgment, by whom all things are weighed, (1 Sam. ii. 3) even every dram and scruple of the cross. A just God,

and will punish no more than is deserved : " He will not lay upon man more than is right," Job xxxiv. 23. As well no more than is meet, as no more than is right. He is a good God, and does only what our need and profit require.

God's people may rejoice in tribulations : Paul gloried in them, Rom. v. 8. To His children, miseries have the sting taken out of them ; God's rod is not a sign of his anger—His heart is with them, however His hand be heavy upon them. The nature of afflictions is changed to them ;—they are trials, preventions, medicines to believers. They proceed from covenant love, and are designed for their good. They breed faith, which fixes the heart : " He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord," Psalm cxii. 7. They breed fortitude ; or, cleaving to God under the greatest trials, Psalm xliv. 17, 18. Now this becometh a testimony and proof of our love to God, and so bringeth comfort. They breed obedience, and that leaveth a pleasant savour behind.—They breed waiting and patience, when all hope is cut off. " Therefore I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation," Micah vii. 7. They drive us to these comforts. Man, even regenerate man, lives by sense more than by faith, but his sorrows drive him to God : indeed, men that wholly forget God in prosperity, flee to him in adversity. " Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled ; I cried to thee, O Lord," &c., Psalm xxx. 7, 8. The sweetness of the word is best tasted under the bitterness of the cross ; God and his word are never so sweet to his people, as in adversity. " In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts refresh my soul," Psalm xlix. 19.

Let no calamity then drive you from the command-

ments, for there you will find more comfort, than trouble can take from you, 1 John iii. 1, 2. Shall the reproach of men have more power to make us sad, than the honor of being God's children hath power to comfort us? Let us be ashamed that we can delight in our privileges no more: "My brethren, count it all joy that ye fall into divers temptations," James i. 2.—"Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven," Matt. v. 12.—"Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost," 1 Thess. i. 6.

XCV. 'Tis my happiness below
 Not to live without the cross,
 But the Saviour's pow'r to know,
 Sanctifying ev'ry loss:
 Trials must and will befall,
 But, with humble faith, to see
 Love inscrib'd upon them all,
 This is happiness to me.

God in Israel sows the seeds
 Of affliction, pain, and toil;
 These spring up and choke the weeds,
 Which would else o'erspread the soil:
 Trials make the promise sweet,
 Trials give new life to prayer;
 Trials bring me to His feet,
 Lay me low, and keep me there.

Did I meet no trials here,
 No chastisement by the way,
 Might I not with reason fear
 I should prove a cast-away?
 Bastards may escape the rod, (Heb. xii. 8),
 Sunk in earthly vain delight;
 But the true-born child of God
 Must not, would not, if he might.

XCVI. It is God that ties up our corruptions, that they run not so violently on the soul at one time as they do at another, for He hath the command of them by His Spirit. There is no christian but suffers in one way or another, even in the time of outward peace; God thus exercises him, that He may make him weary of a vain, tempting, sinful world, by this spiritual conflict. If they know what a life of grace means, He makes them know what it is to be absent from heaven—He makes them know that this life is a place of absence from Himself, and all this to help our disposition to salvation, by helping mortification, and by helping our desire for heaven. Those that go on in a smooth course, that “have no changes,” know not what the inward conflict is, and are carried away by their sins. But that which afflicts most the true child of God, the affliction of all afflictions, is, that inward combat between the flesh and the spirit: and the usual means God uses for its subduing, are outward troubles and persecution. God’s children, in trouble and sorrow, find little molestation from their corruptions, because God will not lay more upon them than he will give them strength to bear: and now when He singles them out to outward crosses, he subdues their corruptions, that they do not vex them as before. In a time of peace He lets loose their corruptions, sometimes anger, sometimes pride, sometimes one base affection, sometimes another. And think you this is no grief to them? O yes, this grieves them and troubles them more than any cross would do. St. Paul was more grieved at this than at his outward sufferings, and they were not light, as you may see by turning to 2 Cor. xi. 23—28. This made him cry out, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?” Rom. vii. 24. He doth not say, Who shall deliver me

from crosses and afflictions? though they made him wretched in the eye of the world, yet he rejoiced in these, 2 Cor. xii. 10; but the grief was that he could not do the good he would, Rom. vii. 18, 19, and that made him cry out, "O wretched man that I am." But God's children learn in whatsoever condition they may be, to resign themselves into God's hands: Lord, if thou wilt have me suffer, I will suffer—if thou wilt have me afflicted, I yield myself—if thou wilt have me enjoy prosperity, well, I know thou canst sustain me in it, I know it shall be for the good of others as well as myself. There is a variety in the life of a christian, he is now afflicted and now comforted, not for his own sake only, but for the good of others: and when he shall be afflicted, and how long, and what comfort he shall have, and how much he leaves to the wisdom of God. It is a blessed state, if we could think of it aright, to be a christian, whatever befalls us. We need care for nothing but to serve God—we need care for nothing but to keep a conscience void of offence. Let God alone with our estate, for God will enable us to want and to abound in our own persons, and likewise he will sanctify our estate for the good of others. A christian will be willing to be tossed, and to be changed from vessel to vessel, from state to state. If his afflictions may benefit any one, he is content that God should withdraw his blessings from him, and humble him with crosses: if his example may be good to others, he is joyful when God gives him rest and causeth an inward peace. He hath learned self-denial on his first entrance into christianity, not to live unto himself, but for the glory of God and the good of others, as much as may be. We should labour, therefore, to content ourselves in all conditions, knowing that all is for the best. God when he takes things from us,

when he afflicts us and when he comforts us, intends that it shall work together for our good ; so we should reason when we endure anything. Let us carry ourselves then, so that God may not be dishonored, and others may have edification and comfort ; we are but God's stewards to convey what is his to others that are of the same body as ourselves. Therefore, in our communion with others, we ought to express the blessed experience of the comforts God has bestowed upon us. This is the practice of holy men in their meeting with others : "Come, I will show you what God hath done for my soul," saith the Psalmist. A dead, sullen, reserved spirit, is not a christian spirit ; and, if by nature we have such, we must labour to improve it by grace, for grace is diffusive and communicating. And mark the extent of the loving wisdom and providence of God, how many things he doth at once ; for in the same affliction ofttimes, he corrects something in his children, in the same affliction he tries some grace, in the same affliction he witnesseth to his truth in them ; he doth good to others, besides the good he doth to themselves. In the same affliction that others afflict, he hasteneth the ruin of the ungodly that inflict it, while he ripens grace in his own children, making them examples to others, and all in the same action, so large is the wise providence of God. This should teach us to follow that providence—to see how many ways, anything we suffer may extend ; that if one way will not comfort, another may. When we suffer and are grieved, let us consider withal, that he, that doth the wrong, hastens his own ruin and judgment. As Pharaoh, when he sought the overthrow of the children of Israel, hastened his own overthrow in the Red Sea. Thus a pit is digged for the ungodly, when they dig a pit for the

godly, Psalm lvii. 6. And consider, to comfort thyself, thou hast some sin in thee, and God intends not only to witness his truth, but to correct that sin in thee, or thou hast some grace in thee, and he intends the trial of it. Look to these things. Consider what God calls us to, for God looks to many things in the same act. Wherefore doth God give us reason, but to be able to follow him in his dealings towards us? Before there be comfort, there must be suffering, for God hath established this order even as in nature—there must be night before the day, winter before summer. So in the kingdom of Christ, in his ruling of the church, there is this divine policy, there must be suffering before comfort. God will as soon break the league and the covenant between day and night, as this league between suffering and comfort, the one must be before the other; it was so in our head Christ, he suffered, and then entered into his glory; so all his members must be conformable to him in suffering, and then enter into glory.

The reasons of this are diverse:—

First of all, because God finds us in a corrupt state, and something must be wrought out of us, before we can be vessels meet to receive comfort; therefore there must be a purifying one way or other, either by repentance, or if not by repentance, by affliction to help repentance, there must be suffering before comfort: till then the soul is unfit for comfort.

Secondly, the order commends and sweetens comfort to us; for fire is sweet after cold, meat after hunger, so is comfort sweet after suffering. God endears comfort to us by this; to those that have felt the cross, comfort is indeed comfort to them; heaven is indeed heaven to him, that hath had a hell in his conscience

upon earth, that hath been afflicted in conscience, or outwardly persecuted, it sets a price and value upon comfort. It likewise sharpens our desire of comfort; for suffering breeds sense, and sense stirs up desire, and desire is eager. By this means likewise, God comes to his own end, which is our eternal happiness, therefore have we that which is ill in the first place. Wo to us if it should be said to us as to Dives in the gospel, "Son, thou hadst thy good things here, and now thou must have thy ill." God intends not to deal so with his children, but they taste the worst wine first and better afterward, because He intends eternal happiness for them; He observes this method, first ill, and then good, the best at last.

If this be so, why should we be offended at God's order? The afflictions that God sends to prepare and fit us for happiness—to sharpen our desire after real happiness—to make it precious to us. Certainly it is a ground not only of patience and meekness, but of joy and comfort, in all the things we suffer. Will a patient be angry with his surgeon for searching his wound? He knows that that is the way to cure him. This is the method in nature, the ground must be first ploughed and harrowed, and then comes the harvest; let us be content with this method and rejoice in any suffering, knowing it will have a blessed issue. It is that which sweetens the cross. All our discomforts and afflictions are but by the way here: we are travellers, and here we are but in a travelling state, and must expect discomforts on our journey. And it should strike terror into those who will not endure so much as the lightest cross—that will endure nothing. Do they consider that this is God's order? Do they seek to avoid crosses in any degree? and do they think to have comfort? No, God will

not change his order for them ; He hath established this order, and heaven and earth shall pass away, rather than God's order shall not be sure. If we will have comfort, we must suffer—if we will avoid suffering and think to go to heaven another way than God hath ordained, we may take our own way, but we must give Him leave to take his way in comforting and advancing whom he will ; and that will not be us, because we will not frame ourselves to His order : “ If we will not suffer with him, we shall not reign with him.”

XCVII. Lord, I believe a rest remains,
To all thy people known :
A rest where pure enjoyment reigns,
And thou art lov'd alone :

A rest, where all our soul's desire
Is fix'd on things above ;
Where fear, and sin, and grief expire,
Cast out by perfect love.

O that I now that rest might know,
Believe, and enter in !
Now, Saviour, now the pow'r bestow,
And let me cease from sin.

Remove this hardness from my heart,
This unbelief remove ;
To me the rest of faith impart,
The Sabbath of thy love.

I would be thine, thou know'st I would,
And have thee all my own ;
Thee,—O my all-sufficient good !
I want,—and thee alone.

Thy name to me, thy nature grant,
This, only this be giv'n ;
Nothing besides my God I want,
Nothing in earth or heav'n.

Come, O my Saviour, come away !
Into my soul descend !
No longer from thy creature stay,
My Author and my end.

The bliss, thou hast for me prepar'd,
No longer be delay'd !
Come, my exceeding great reward,
For whom I first was made.

Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
And seal me thine abode :
Let all I am in thee be lost,
Let all be lost in God.

XCVIII. God “takes vengeance of his people’s inventions,” Psalm xcix. 8, though he accepts their persons and hears their prayers, that he may prevent the abuse of his covenant mercy. The price of redemption and pardon cost God dear, and he will not have the blessing of it esteemed common. There is, in the best saints, that corruption of nature, which, without the power of Divine restraints, would discover itself in the worst of sins. Samson went out to shake himself as at other times, relying upon God’s promise when he had profaned His ordinance. Peter presumed upon safety from temptation, though he went into the way of temptation. The tenor of the promise is :—“ He will keep thee in all thy ways.” Abounding grace has given occasion to some to have light thoughts of great sins. That freedom of access, which believers have to God, through Christ, has

not always been kept from degenerating into a presumptuous boldness. Therefore, God so deals with his people, as that "Their own wickedness shall correct them, and their own backslidings shall reprove them," Jer. ii. 19. Samson falls into the hands of his enemies. Peter, instead of owning Him to the death, denies his Lord with oaths and cursing. If we are conformists to the world, we must take the world's lot. The punishment shall show what the sin is, for which God takes vengeance. A holy covenant obliges to a holy conversation. If the people of God, like the men at Bethshemish, look into the ark with an unwarrantable curiosity and presumption, they must pay for their rashness, 1 Sam. vi. 19. Vengeance is taken of God's own people, to prevent the abuse of covenant mercy; and also to discover the holiness of God's nature and of his law. "The Lord our God is holy," Psalm xcix. 9. There are some things becoming God, Heb. ii. 14:—namely, that He secures his own glory in all that he does—that He dishonors not himself in any of his acts of mercy—that what He professes himself to be, he makes appear that he is a God of righteousness, holiness and truth, before the whole world. Men see our sins, but they see not our repentance—our humiliations,—our pardon. They see God dishonored, and his law broken; but how this law is repaired by the obedience of Christ, or how God's people have interest therein, they see not. Therefore God testifies his displeasure against the sin, which is public, although he forgives the person, which is a more private and secret act. Reproach must be rolled off from his own name, though it abides upon thine. Hence says God to David, "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also, that is born unto thee, shall surely

die," 2 Sam. xii. 14. God's awful dispensations, though to believers they are no other than fatherly chastisements, are a public vindication of his holiness and justice before the world. By the "vengeance which God takes of his people's inventions," he discovers the holiness of his own nature and law. This He does to beget watchfulness and circumspection in all their walk before him. Sins, which God condemns in the life, lead to a narrow search and examination into the sins of the heart. Job was falsely accused by his friends, but righteously corrected of God: "I will say unto God, do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me," chap. x. 2. The very life of a believer lies in heart holiness, and in an aim after a conformity to Christ in every duty. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults," Psalm xix. 12. Those vain imaginations of the mind, such as no eye sees but God's; and those corrupt desires and affections which proceed from thence, pressing upon the will continually, resolutely, these are things which cast the soul into a dead, lifeless, carnal, loose frame—by these God is grieved: and here begins a believer's humiliation, watchfulness and cares. If thou canst but walk humbly with God, no doubt but thou wilt walk honorably before men. God punishes sin in thee, some sins unknown to others, that he may bring thee into a closer walk, and more humble frame and fellowship with himself. God loved his own and chose them from eternity; and if there be any blessing more than ordinarily sweet, it shall be bestowed upon those he loveth in his Son. If He rebukes he loves. The covenant subsists firm and invariable, when the dispensations of it change. Clouds and darkness may be about him now, but they will blow over in a little time. The everlasting covenant runs through life, and

through death. God will suffer thee to talk with him of his judgments, though he does not remove them: ply the throne of grace and he will reconcile thee to them. "I will bear," says the church in Micah, (vii. 9) "the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him; until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me." Our God has better things for us, than the utmost of what we can ask or desire. Communion, near and intimate fellowship with God, will make amends for the loss of any temporal mercy. God will answer and forgive his people, though he takes vengeance of their inventions, because of the relation he stands in unto them, as their covenant God. He hath already received a RANSOM for them, from the hands of their Surety. Their persons and their mercies are bought out of the hands of justice; and, if a price be paid, He is "faithful and just," not to detain the goods for which it is paid. God corrects his children, not for the satisfaction of his justice; the chastisement of our peace was upon another, by way of satisfaction; Christ hath borne the burden of every sin. All God's corrections are for the display of his holiness, and that we might be purified and made holy thereby. Moses and Aaron were a people near and dear unto God, even when corrected and reproved by him. Love to a believer's person is perfectly consistent with indignation against his sin. So long as there is virtue in Christ's blood, and acceptableness in his person and work, as our Advocate before the throne—so long fear not, soul, the continuance of God's favor, as a pardoning and prayer-answering God. There is worthiness in the Lamb that was slain, though there be new guilt and defilement from day to day in thee. God has found and accepted a ransom, therefore he will hear and pardon thee. Christ has more to say

for believers before God, than all their sins have to say against them. God answers and forgives his people, because it is one of HIS TITLES, that so he will do: "O thou, that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come," Psalm lxv. 2.—"Thou art a God ready to pardon," Neh. ix. 7. Though he be a just God, yet is he also a Saviour. One part of God's name casts no dishonor or reproach upon another. If He prepares the heart to seek, will he not prepare the ear to hear? When He visits most sorely on account of sin, his visitations are all in mercy. Love lies at the bottom of all His dealings with his children, and there are comforts prepared for the most afflicted state any of them can be in. God will not be called "the God of all comfort" in vain. The light of God's countenance, and the love of his heart, are two things—one may be wanting, but the other never can be, to his elect. Should God mark iniquities and not forgive sin, (Psalm cxxx) there could be none among the children of men to serve him: "All we like sheep have gone astray." There is dross mixed with our finest gold. The Canaanite is left in the land to prove, but not to destroy us. There is corruption in the best to humble, but not to condemn. Grace and mercy are promised for a time of need. Shall we murmur then, or marvel at any of our trials? Look within, and you may see the cause of all. If sin be regarded in the heart, chastisement must follow in the life. Consider who God is, and what sin deserves; then, whatever be thy affliction, distress, or sorrow, thou wilt be dumb, because God hath done it. Does God answer and forgive, and yet take vengeance? Labour then to have your affections suited to Providential dispensations. The view of mercy is sweet. In prosperity give thanks. The appearance

of judgment strikes terror. Yet, "Let them praise thy great and terrible name, for it is holy," Psalm xcix. 3. This should lead to deep humiliation and mourning. It is a beautiful frame of soul to be in, when all the affections are in exercise at once: that Providence which does this for the PRESENT, may appear awful, but it will ever be found, in the END, to be advantageous. Thou speakest as David did, IN HASTE, when thou concludest that, "all these things are against thee." Labour hard for answerableness of spirit to Providential dispensations. Above all, bless God for Christ, whatever mercy thou wantest. There would be no pardon without a sacrifice—no person accepted but through Christ's righteousness imputed—no pardon given but what comes through his hands—no prayer heard, save in the virtue of his intercession. Admire God's patience. So many inventions, and no more vengeance;—O! amazing! It is well for us God doth not mark every iniquity. Set God as an holy God before thee, daily. "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling." Wo to such as were never interested in God's forgiveness. "The wages of sin is death." Without interest in God, as a covenant God, there can be no pardon—no hope—no heaven. This is by Christ, "in whom, whosoever believeth shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

XCIX. Jerusalem! my happy home!
Name ever dear to me!
When shall my labours have an end
In joy, and peace, and thee?

When shall these eyes thy heaven-built walls
And pearly gates behold—
Thy bulwarks, with salvation strong,
And streets of shining gold?

There happier bowers than Eden's bloom,
Nor sin nor sorrow know :
Bless'd seats ! thro' rude and stormy scenes
I onward press to you.

Why should I shrink at pain and woe,
Or feel, at death, dismay ?
I've Canaan's goodly land in view,
And realms of endless day.

Apostles, martyrs, prophets there,
Around my Saviour stand ;
And soon my friends in Christ, below,
Will join the glorious band.

Jerusalem ! my happy home !
My soul still pants for thee ;
Then shall my sorrows have an end,
When I thy joys shall see.

C. "The Lord reigneth," Psalm xcvi. 1. This doctrine serves for the unspeakable consolation of the people of God. It is a matter of rejoicing to ALL the world, that "the Lord reigneth," for there is none so vile and wicked but experiences much, though many consider it not, of the good effects of this universal dominion, which God exercises. Through it the devils cannot do what they please—through it the wills and passions of evil men cannot have their full sway ; there is an almighty One that holds the reins upon the malicious and hateful passions of men ; the ill effects of which, the greatest contemners of God that live in the world, would quickly experience ; but to the people of God, as being the lesser number, the most hated and maligned part of the world, and the far weaker, as to natural strength and power, the good effects of the Lord's reign,

and the necessity of it are most eminently demonstrated : “ How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation ; that saith unto Zion, “ **THY GOD REIGNETH,** ” Isaiah lii. 7 : particularly to Zion, to the church and people of God is it good tidings—to the whole visible church it is good tidings—but particularly to the invisible part, that is militant here upon earth, and the individual members thereof. This doctrine, first, is of great use to comfort them against, and under all their distresses for things which happen to the church in general, or themselves in particular. A ship at sea were but in an ill case if it were not for him that sitteth at the helm ; a skilful pilot there ordereth her well enough, so that the winds serve his design ; thus it is with the church, or with God’s people individually, they are only safe in the Lord’s government of all the affairs of this lower world. Luther, I remember, saith thus of himself, “ I have often attempted to prescribe to God ways and methods in the government of his church, and other affairs ; I have said I would have this thing done in this order, with this event. But God did quite contrary to what I asked of him. Then I thought with myself what I would have had, was not contrary to the glory of God, but would have been of great use in sanctifying his name. In short, it was a brave design, well advised, but undoubtedly God laughed at this wisdom of men ; it never was his manner to allow men to instruct, govern, teach, or lead Him. God is not a passive, but an active God.” That great man and Melancthon were two famous instruments in the reformation of Germany, but of different tempers : Melancthon was a man of a more mild and gentle spirit, of a melancholic and

timorous temper. Luther was more fierce and bold. Melancthon would often write very desponding letters to Luther about the state of the church. Luther would constantly make use of this argument from the governing providence of God to support him. "Melancthon," saith he, "let God alone to govern the world; 'The Lord reigneth.' " It pleases God so to order it in his providence, that the face of affairs relating to the church, often looks sadly, and there is nothing which giveth the spirits of the people of God greater disturbance. Now all this arises from our not attending to this principle, which yet every true christian professes to receive and to believe. Were we but rooted and grounded in the faith of this one principle, that "The kingdom of God ruleth over all, and that he exerciseth a special care and government relating to his church, and ruleth the world with a special regard to the good of his little flock," we could neither be immoderately disturbed for the concern for the glory of God, nor yet for the church of Christ. "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let men say among the nations, The Lord reigneth: let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof, let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein: then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the Lord, because he cometh to judge the earth," 1 Chron. xvi. 31—33. Say therefore unto Zion, "Thy God reigneth." Let the ungodly rage, scoff and threaten, and do what they can; let them take counsel together and join hand in hand; when they have done all they can, they will find, that "the Lord reigneth." And this is enough to say unto Zion, or to any of her sons and daughters. Two things are sufficient in the most troublesome and tumultuous times to still, support, and comfort the desponding spirits of God's people:—

1. That "The Lord reigneth," and hath an unquestionable superintendence over all the beings of his creatures, all their motions and all their actions; He is higher in power than the highest of them.

2. That this God is our God. The Psalmist uniteth both in that excellent Psalm, xlvi. 10, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth: the Lord of hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our refuge." Let not therefore those, that fear the Lord, trouble themselves about the motions of the world, and commotions in it—about the ragings of godless men against the interest of Christ. Let them not trouble themselves further than is their absolute duty, that is, to be sensible of the rebukes of Divine providence. "He that sitteth in the heavens laugheth; the Lord shall have them in derision, and shall ONE DAY speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure," and let the world know, that "yet hath he set his king upon his holy hill of Zion." Did we but consider this as we might or ought, we should see as little reason to be disturbed, as to the concerns of our own souls. God's people are troubled with the fear of two things as to their own souls ordinarily, first, the prevailings of their own lusts and corruptions, secondly, the prevailing of Satan's temptations. This doctrine excellently serves to still our unquiet spirits, as to either of these troubles. If the Lord's kingdom be over all, both these fears must be vain and causeless; supposing the faithfulness of the promises:—"Sin shall not have dominion over your mortal bodies.—God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.—He will, with the temptation, make a way to escape." If the Lord's kingdom be over all, neither shall corruption prevail, nor Satan de-

stroy the work of God in our souls, or hinder us as to the kingdom, which God hath prepared for those that seek him. For, as He that hath promised is faithful, neither can He repent, or lie; so is He powerful and hath a dominion over all beings, persons, things, and events. "My Father," saith Christ, "is greater than all; none can pluck you of my Father's hand." Lastly, it affords us a relief against the sad prospect, we have almost continually before our eyes, of the malicious actions of ungodly men. There is, and always was a generation in the world, which rest not unless they do mischief: they are continually devising mischievous devices against the flock of Christ; their counsels, designs, works, have a plain tendency to the ruin of the whole interest of God in the world, and if possible, not to leave Christ a name in the earth, nor the gospel a footing in any place. He that runs may read, that, the malice of some is against no particular form of religion, but against the life, the power, the practice of holiness. But trouble not yourselves, christians, "The Lord reigneth;" the frogs out of the bottomless pit, may, through God's permission, get out, and croak awhile, but to the pit they must return again. A sad time it was when the enemy of souls said to the man after God's own heart, "Flee as a bird to the mountains:" when "the wicked bent their bows, and made their arrows ready upon the string, that they might privily shoot at the upright in heart," Psalm xi. 1, 2. When the foundations were destroyed, and the godly knew not what to do. Observe the same Psalmist, in ver. 4, says, "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try the children of men." In Psalm xcix. 1, 2, it is said, "The Lord reigneth, let the people" [that is the ungodly] "tremble; He sitteth

between the cherubims, let the earth be moved. The Lord is great in Zion, and he is high above all people." What an encouragement is here to the people of God, under his severest dispensations towards them, to go on and do good, Psalm xxxvii. 3—5. Do not defame the great God of heaven, by saying or thinking that you cleanse your hands in vain, nor that he taketh a long day to answer our prayers, "Behold," saith the Lord, "I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every one according as his work shall be," Rev. xxii. 12. It will not be long before Christ will come with his great reward of grace; but as he punisheth the ungodly, so he rewardeth his own children every day. It may be, He doth not reward thee with length of days—an healthful body—a plentiful estate—and other comforts of this life; His wisdom sees that these things are not fit for thee, He knoweth thy heart—thy temper; but hast thou not a peace and calm within thee, the gift of His own Holy Spirit?—Art thou not strengthened with might in the inner man?—Doth not Christ dwell in thy heart by faith?—Art thou not rooted and grounded in love, and able, in some measure, to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that thou mayest be filled with all the fulness of God? Thou art, it may be, troubled on every side, but art thou distressed?—thou art perplexed, but art thou in despair?—thou art persecuted, but art thou forsaken?—thou art cast down, but art thou destroyed? Thou bearest "about in the body, the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in thy body," 2 Cor. iv. 8—10. Is this no reward? It may be, it is not the reward thou lookedst for, but it is that reward which God

seest fittest for thee. It is not all that thou shalt have, when He shall come, whose reward is with him (and he telleth thee that will be quickly), then thou mayest expect fuller and greater things; in the mean time thou hast enough for thy passage through the wilderness. The work of God is wages to itself, but God gives the wages besides; yea, and "eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor can it enter into the heart of man to conceive, what great things God hath further prepared for them that love him." Say not then, that thou servest God for nothing, and faint not, neither be weary of well-doing, for thou shalt reap if thou faint not.

CI. Th' Almighty reigns, exalted high
O'er all the earth, o'er all the sky ;
Tho' clouds and darkness veil his feet,
His dwelling is the mercy-seat.

O ye, that love his holy name,
Hate ev'ry work of sin and shame :
He guards the souls of all his friends,
And from the snares of hell defends.

Immortal light, and joys unknown,
Are for his saints in darkness sown :
Those glorious seeds shall spring and rise,
And the bright harvest bless our eyes.

Rejoice ye righteous, and record
The sacred honors of the Lord ;
None but the soul that feels his grace,
Can triumph in his holiness.

CII. Whatever thy condition may be, whatever strait thou art in, be not discouraged, but seek to thy heavenly

Father "who seeth in secret." "The Lord's Prayer" is concluded with this, "For thine is the kingdom, power, and glory, for ever and ever." As if that were the ground of all the petitions that went before. So, if the Lord is Almighty, and hath an almighty power, then, in the most desperate case, when there is no help, or hope in the creature, that you can discern, pray to Him, pray earnestly and confidently, as men full of hope to obtain what they desire.

And remember this for your comfort; at that time, when you are in affliction, and in so great a strait, that you are so hedged about, that there seems no hope, no possibility to escape, that is the time that the Lord will show forth his power; for man's extremity is God's opportunity; how often have I seen this in my own experience, that when the case hath been desperate, when there seemed no hope, yet when God hath been sought to by prayer, there hath been an alteration above all thought, according to that expression used—"He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us," Eph. iii. 20. That is, when they could not enlarge their thoughts so far, nor were able to see there could be any way devised, yet enlarging their prayers, the Lord hath oftentimes "made a way to escape." How many instances of this doth scripture give us. When Esau came against Jacob, was he not then in a fearful strait? there seemed no hope and no possibility; Esau was too strong for him; what should Jacob do now? he exposeth himself to the enemy, there seemed no other remedy; and it was an enmity of twenty years continuance; and the text saith, "Jacob feared," Gen. xxxii. 7, and yet the Lord delivered him, when he had prayed to him. So Daniel, when he was cast into the lion's den, when

they were ready to devour him, yet the Lord stopped their mouths, that they could do him no hurt. Thus it is with ourselves, in many cases, when we think our enemies are ready to devour us, God comes in, as it were, between the cup and the lip, and works a way for our deliverance. Therefore never be discouraged—He that died for thee, will take care of thee—He, that pardoned thine aggravated offences, will heal thine infirmities : only believe, that the Lord can do it, though to thy fearful nature it appear impossible : for “with God all things are possible,” Matt. xix. 26. See the faith of the three children in Dan. iii, when the fire was prepared for them, and there was no resistance ; and the king was wroth, yet they said, “The Lord is able to save us out of thy hand, O king!” The Lord did hear their prayer, and did help and save them. On the contrary, when a man doth doubt of God’s power, you shall see of how much moment it is, as that noble said to Elisha, “Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?” Now the Lord was so displeased with the saying, that he destroyed him for it. So the Israelites did not believe that the Lord could bring them into the land of Canaan, therefore the Lord’s anger was kindled against them : “because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation,” Psalm lxxvii. 22. Learn then to bring your hearts to this, whatsoever your case may be, still to believe his power, and say still, “The Lord can do it;” for it argues a strong faith to be able to do so under all circumstances. When your state is low—when there seems no hope, no help at hand, then go to God, with such cheerfulness, such earnestness, such confidence, as knowing it would be the easiest thing in the world for Him to help thee: which

you would do, if you believed that "He is able" [and WILLING] "to save them to the uttermost, that come unto him," by Christ, Heb vii. 25. Nay, when thou art at the lowest, yet pray with as great hope, as if thou hadst the best props to lean upon, for the Lord is able to raise thee up again.

Believers, in their best estate, should be prepared for change. The Lord often does bring them down when they least expect it, so that the caution, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall," (1 Cor. x. 12) is most necessary. And if he hath stood, let him give God all the glory. Jerusalem, the city of the Lord, was so strong, there were such probabilities of safety, that no one would have thought an enemy could have entered into the gates thereof; yet the almighty power of the Lord brought it down, so that our Saviour's prediction, relative to the temple, was verified to the letter: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another," Matt. xxiv. 2. Therefore, let the case be what it will, suppose a nation be never so strong, yet God can bring it down; and let it be never so weak or low, yet the Lord is able to raise it up. The same is true of every individual also, and, therefore, believe this almighty power of God, and apply it, whatever thy case be. Consider that thou hast to do with an almighty God! Follow the patience of Christ, who said in his extremity, "Lord, if thou wilt, let this cup pass from me; yet not my will, but thine be done;" and if He do not remove that you fear, yet he can give you that which is better; he can give you patience to endure, and in the end joy and peace. Submit then yourself to God's will, as Christ did, and remember, that in such a case, your business is not with the power but the will of God: give the Lord the glory of his power in every case, if it

be but his will. Is it meet God's will should yield to thine, or thine to his? Then bring thine heart down, and be content that it should be so. Consider it is God's will, and therefore it must be best for thee; honor him so far as to prefer his will before thine own. Again I say, it being His will, be assured, that if you belong to him, it shall be best for thee: Christ was no loser when he yielded to his Father's will, for he "was heard in that he feared," Heb. v. 7; though the Lord's will passed on him, and he drank up the cup of his Father's wrath to the very dregs. So must you yield to His will whatever it is; be content with what is done, and believe thou shalt be no loser by it in the end, but thou shalt have what thou desirest, though not in the manner that thou wouldest have it done. In every affliction we suffer on earth, cease not to think upon God, and remember his mercy and truth. And be the accomplishment of His words ever so unlikely, never stagger at his promise through unbelief: "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" Jer. xxxii. 27.

CIII. What various hind'rances we meet
In coming to a mercy-seat!
Yet who, that knows the worth of pray'r,
But wishes to be often there?

Pray'r makes the darken'd cloud withdraw,
Pray'r climbs the ladder Jacob saw,
Gives exercise to faith and love,
Brings ev'ry blessing from above.

Restraining pray'r, we cease to fight;
Pray'r makes the christian's armour bright;
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.

While Moses stood with arms spread wide,
Success was found on Israel's side ;
But when thro' weariness they fail'd,
That moment Amalek prevail'd.

Have you no words ? ah, think again,
Words flow apace, when you complain,
And fill your fellow-creature's ear
With the sad tale of all your care.

Were half the breath, thus vainly spent,
To heav'n in supplication sent,
Your cheerful song would oft'ner be,
“ Hear what the Lord has done for me !”

CIV. A steadfast faith in the Divine providence and promises, will compose the soul to a quiet submission to God's pleasure in the sharpest troubles. All things are under the intimate inspection—the wise conduct—the powerful influence of His providence. This is one of those prime, universal, rich truths, from whence so many practical consequences are derived. By virtue of it we may infallibly conclude, that all things that come to pass, are disposed in the best season, and best manner, for the best ends. If we understood the immediate reasons of every particular decree, we could not be more infallibly assured of the wisdom and goodness—the rectitude and equity of God's dispensations, than by this universal principle, that is applicable to all events, that “what God appoints is best.” That we may feel the blessed influence of it more effectually, let us consider, that Divine providence extends to the whole creation ; it is infinite, and overruling all things. Thus it is said in scripture, “ He rideth upon the heavens ” to signify his absolute power in ordering all the motions of the most high, vast, and glorious part of the visible universe. “ He

telleth the number of the stars—he calleth them all by their names.” The stars are the brightest and most active parts of the vast region above us, and are called the host of heaven, with respect to their number and order; and though they seem innumerable to our senses, yet the multitude is exactly known to God, and yields ready and entire obedience to his pleasure. From whence the Psalmist infers, “Great is the Lord, and of great power, his understanding is infinite,” Psalm cxlvii. 5. There is nothing in the lower world exempted from the empire and activity of God’s providence. He is immoveable, and moves all—invisible, and yet appears in all. The most casual things are not without His guidance. “A man drew a bow at a venture” (1 Kings xxii. 34) without express aim, but God directed the arrow through the joints of Ahab’s armour, that penetrated to the springs of life. The minutest and least things are ordered by Him. It is not an hyperbolical expression of our Saviour, but an absolute truth, that “the very hairs of our head are all numbered,” and not one falls to the ground without His permission, Matt. x. 30. The voluntary and most indetermined causes of things are under His conduct. The hearts of men, even of kings, that are most absolute and unconfined, are in the hand of the Lord; he turns them according to his pleasure, as the streams of water are, by several trenches, conveyed to refresh a garden, by the skilful husbandman. Sin, the most disorderly thing in the world, is not only within the compass of His permission, but is limited and disposed by his providence; and such is his goodness, that he would not permit it if his power could not overrule that evil for a good,—that preponderates the evil. And all afflictive evils, by His own declaration, are the effects of his just and powerful pro-

vidence: "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" His providence is comprehensive and complete; no unforeseen accidents in the freest and most contingent things, no involuntary obstruction in the most necessary things, can break the entireness, or discompose the order of his providence: "The Lord is in heaven, he doth whatsoever he pleaseth in heaven, and in earth, in the sea, and in all deep places." How exactly and easily does He manage and overrule all things! The whole world is His house, and all the successive generations of men his family; some are his sons, by voluntary subjection; others his slaves, and, by just constraint, fulfil his pleasure. It was the saying of a wise king, instructed by experience, that the art of governing was like the laborious travail of a weaver, that requires the attention of the mind, and the activity of the body; the eyes, hands, and feet are all in exercise; and how often is the contexture of human counsels, though woven with the greatest care, yet unexpectedly broken? So many cross accidents interpose; so many emergencies, beyond all prevention, start up to frustrate the hopes and designs of the most potent rulers of this world.*

But God disposes all things with more facility than one of us can move a grain of sand: the government of the world has a less proportion to his infinite wisdom and uncontrollable power, than a grain of sand has to the

* An admirable writer of the present day, observes:—"Was there no command given to the winds and the waves, when, in the days of Elizabeth, the Spanish Armada strewed with its wreck the shores it had invaded? Or to the cold of the north, when a Russian winter, of extraordinary severity, cut off at a stroke the army of the invader, and sent back the scourge of Europe humbled and alone?"—Rev. Francis Goode's Sermons.

strength of a man. His counsel shall always stand; all second causes depend upon Him in their beings, their agency and influences. Nothing is executed in this visible kingdom below, but by express order from His invisible court; and all occurrences are made use of for the accomplishing the designs of his electing mercy, in the glorification of his saints; now all that is comfortable and reviving, is contained in this principle. If His providence reaches to the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field, much more to his children, in whom he hath a property: and such is his condescending love, and inconceivable benignity, that he styles himself by the most endearing relation, "their God." They are the prime part of his vigilant care. It is Augustine's affectionate ejaculation, "O! Omnipotent Goodness, that so particularly regardest every one of us, as if the sole objects of thy tender care, and all of us as single persons!" The sun applies its quickening influence for the production and growth of a single plant, as particularly as if there were no other things in the world to receive it; yet at the same time, it passes from sign to sign in the heavens, changes the scenes of the elements, produces new seasons, and its active and prolific heat forms and transforms whatever is changed in nature. This is a fit resemblance of the universal and special operations of Divine providence; what a strong security does this give to a christian, in the midst of all trouble, in this corrupt and changeable world! How will it clear the mind from those miserable perplexities, and quiet those precipitate passions, that so often afflict the afflicted! Whatever evils befall God's people, are with the knowledge, the will, and by the efficiency of God, materially considered; and is He defective in wisdom, power, or goodness, that what He does, either might or

ought to be better otherwise? Indeed, sometimes the special ends of His afflicting providence are in such deep obscurity, that our line is too short to fathom, and the manner how good shall result from evil is unknown; but then we may conclude, by faith, it is for the best. For inferior reasons, we often pray that particular evils that are near may be prevented; but if they overtake us, we may be satisfied that they are appointed by His supreme reason and everlasting counsel. As in a concert of music, the parts are not formed when they are sung, but when composed before by the skill of a musician, and every part assigned convenient to the voices of the singers. Thus the various conditions and passages of our lives were so disposed by the sovereign wisdom of God, from all eternity, and as most fit for us. Whether the evils proceed more immediately and entirely from His hand, or by the intercurrence of instruments, it is equally certain they come by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Our Saviour answers Pilate, "thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." All the afflictive evils that proceed from the malice of men, and increase their guilt and judgment, are ordered by His providence, for the spiritual and eternal good of his people; this consideration will prevent much sin and trouble, that the best of men are liable to in their perturbations and passions. There is nothing more exasperates an afflicted mind than the apprehension that one unjustly suffers. A just punishment, even nature consents, is to be received with meek submission; but to be patient under unjust persecution, not to be provoked by injuries and enemies, is one of the hardest things in the world.

If, by a flash of lightning or a shower of rain, we are

blasted or wet, we endure it patiently ; but if one throw fire or water upon us, we resent the indignity with anger and vexation. Now, if we, in our deliberate thoughts, consider that, God not only permits, but sends all the evils we most unjustly suffer from men, and that he commands our quiet, submissive behaviour under them ; nay, that he will overrule all, so as the issue shall be blessed, what tranquillity and acquiescence will it produce in the sharpest dispensations of his providence ! But, on the contrary, exclude Providence out of the world, and the mind is involved in darkness, with all its terrors. Atheism is the gulf of impiety and wretchedness. "None saith, Where is God, my maker, who giveth songs in the night ?" (Job xxxv. 10) that converts poisons into remedies, and our afflictions into consolations. He, that lives without God in this world, if he lose what he superlatively loves, or fall under an incurable evil, has no other remedy but a resolution to endure it as well as he can ; and he is extremely miserable that has no joy here, nor hopes of it hereafter, nor the encouragement of a happy issue to bear it patiently. In conjunction with the belief of God's providence, our belief of his promises, that his truth is unchangeable, for the performance of them, is requisite to preserve the afflicted spirit in a calm, submissive state. A present evil strikes the imagination and senses in another manner than a future spiritual good. Now "faith is the substance of things hoped for." Heb. xi. 1. It makes invisible things to be the greatest realities to the soul ; the steady reliance upon the Divine attributes engages them to fulfil His promises, and is of an invincible efficacy to strengthen the soul in every distress : "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee." His uncontrollable power governs all the order of crea-

tures, and the honor of his truth is so sacred, that “Heaven and earth shall pass away without the failing of any good thing promised to his people.” Faith assists patience: these graces are inseparable, and are recorded with special observation, as the sources of courage under sufferings.” “Here is the faith and patience of the saints;” and we are directed to “be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises,” Rev. xiii. 10. Other graces are engaged in the christian combat, and strive for victory, but faith and patience are crowned. And to support us in great troubles, a firm affiance in the Divine promises, as belonging to us, is of infinite moment: “I will greatly rejoice, in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God,” Isaiah lxi. 10. A general apprehension of God’s mercy is ineffectual to support us; and to claim a title in him, without a real evidence, is vain. But a regular trust, a faith that is applied, is, to a christian, like the sacred locks of Samson’s hair; whilst they remained, he was invincible; but when cut off, he became weak as other men: our comforts rise or fall according to the stronger or weaker degrees of our faith: one of the sorest and most dangerous temptations of the afflicted, is that they are out of God’s favor. The mourning veil darkens the eyes of the mind, that they cannot see His compassionate countenance, they cannot reconcile his gracious promises with his providential dispensations—the good things he hath prepared for them hereafter, with the evil he sends here.—As Gideon complained to the angel, “If God be with us, how comes all this evil upon us?” And the spirit of darkness takes advantage of great troubles to tempt sad souls to despondency, as if they were utterly forsaken of God. If this temptation prevail, “if the heavens be as brass, and the earth as

iron ;" if no influences descend from above, and there be no springs below ; if Divine and human comforts fail, there remains nothing but desperate sorrow. Augustine, to repel this temptation, introduces God answering the afflicted :—" Is this thy faith ?—Did I promise thee temporal prosperity ?—Were you made a christian for this, that you might flourish in this world ?" The faith of our adoption is confirmed by His corrections. If they are profitable to us, if we are refined, not hardened, by the fiery trial, we have a clear testimony of our interest of Christ : " I will bring them through the fire, and they shall be refined as silver and gold is tried ; and they shall say, The Lord is my God," Zech. xiii. 9.

Briefly, let us strengthen our faith of the glorious state, and our title to it, and it will make us firm against all the violent impressions of adversity ; it will produce a peaceful resignation, even in the afflicted state : the christian, that, with steadfast faith, and attentive consideration, looks to the inestimable, infinite felicity, is regardless of all things in the world, in comparison with it. Sacred history relates of Saul the persecutor, who was transformed into an apostle, that a sudden light from heaven, of that excessive brightness, encompassed him, that he was struck blind, and saw no man : this may be easily and justly applied to every sincere believer, in a moral sense ; the first effect of the spiritual light that shines into the eyes of his mind, and discovers unseen, eternal things, is to darken his sight of the things that are temporal : even the greatest things here are not of such moment, as to allure or terrify him from prosecuting his blessed end. St. Peter declares of persecuted christians, " That believing, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," 1 Peter i. 8. The martyrs embraced the cross of Christ, and prized the

thorns of his crown, more than all the pleasures of this world, or the diadems of earthly dignity, in expectation of the blessed recompence of reward. One draught of the “ river that makes glad the city of God ” above, can sweeten all the bitterness of the world : in short, the christian’s hope is in the apostle’s expression, “ The anchor of the soul sure and steadfast, that enters within the veil ;” it is fastened in heaven, confirmed by the faithfulness of God’s promises, and the prevailing intercession of Christ, and secured to us amidst all the turbulent agitations in the wide sea below. Hope makes the christian not only patient but joyful in all his sufferings. Encouraged by the blessed hope, he comes with joy to death, as the door that opens to the kingdom of glory, and immortal blessedness. Let God be the supreme object of our love and affection ; and whatever evils we sustain, will be made easy and light to us. By love we enjoy God, and love will make us willing to do or suffer what he pleases, that we may have future communion with him. In God all perfections are in transcendent eminence, they are always the same and always new. He gives all things, without any diminution of the treasures ; He receives the praises and services of the angels, without any advantage or increase of His happiness. His infinite goodness can supply all our wants, satisfy all our desires, allay all our sorrows, conquer all our fears. One beam of his countenance can “ revive the spirit, dead in sorrow, and buried in despair.” Jeremiah, in the desolation of his country, supports himself with his interest in God: “ The Lord is my portion, saith my soul,” Lam. iii. 24. The expression signifies the truth and strength of his affectionate choice of God, as his chieftest good. What loss can make a christian poor, whose treasure is above ? What danger

can make him anxious, whose heart is “fixed, trusting in the Lord?” What death can destroy him, whose life is “hid with Christ in God?” Deprive him of all this world can give, yet by communion with God, heaven descends to him, or he ascends to heaven, where God is all in all; the blessed “recompence of reward” is not deferred wholly till our entrance into the heavenly kingdom: there it is a joy refined from all mixture of sorrow; it is infinitely increased; there, spiritual joy meets eternal joy; but it begins here—the gracious soul has a taste and sight “how good the Lord is,” as an earnest of the fulness of joy in heaven. Hope bears some leaves of the tree of life, to refresh us with their fragrancy; and love some fruits to strengthen us. As transplanted fruits, where the soil is not suitable, and the sun less favorable, are not of that beauty and flavour as in their original country, so heavenly joys in this life, are inferior in their degree to those of the blessed above, but they are very refreshing: “In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul,” Psalm xciv. 19. It is the triumphant exultation of the prophet, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation,” Hab. iii. 17, 18. He supposes himself in extremity, utterly destitute, not only of the refreshments, but supports of life; yet he knows how not only to be patient and contented, but joyful in the most forlorn condition. If He says to the afflicted soul I am thy salvation, and within a little while thou shalt be with me for ever in glory, it sufficeth: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say

rejoice." It is the most affectionate counsel of the apostle. These are not inaccessible heights of religion, and points of perfection, to which none can attain; but are the experimental practice of humble, sincere christians, that say with the Psalmist, " Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee." The guilty principle of vexatious discontents and immoderate sorrow, under outward losses and troubles, is a false judgment, that God, without the world, is not sufficient for our complete happiness. It is equally folly to imagine that God, who is an infinite good, suitable to the spiritual, immortal nature of the soul, and all-sufficient to fill the vast capacity and desires of our renewed faculties, the understanding and will, by his glorious perfections—that God, I say, cannot make us happy in his love, because our lower animal faculties, our senses, have not, in our communion with him, what is pleasing to their carnal appetites. Should not the soul, that enjoys the propitious presence of God, be satisfied therewith, when lower comforts fail? This should teach us to moderate our affections to things below. It is indeed a consequence of the former; for if the heart be full of God, it will not admit any inferior object to rival him in his throne. If we consider the vast distance between the perfections of the Creator, and the faint reflection in the creature, our respects and love should be accordingly. Reason, authority, example, and experience, convince us that all things below are empty vanities. It is useless folly to seek for happiness here; and, to borrow the language of the angel, "to seek the living among the dead." If our happiness be from the light and warmth of creatures, how easily is it extinguished, and we are in utter darkness! When there is an exorbitant love in the possess-

ing, there will be extreme and desperate sorrow in losing. One irregular passion feeds and maintains another. The heart is disposed to contrary extremities, and passes from the fire to the frost: the unequal spirit swells or sinks, according to the outward condition. It is the wise advice of the apostle, "that we rejoice as if we rejoiced not," and then "we shall weep as though we wept not." Afflictions are intolerable or light, according to our apprehension of them; an indifference to the things of this world, disposes to self-denial universally, as God is pleased to try us; this was the holy and happy temper of David, "Surely I behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother, my soul is even as a weaned child," Psalm cxxxii. 2. If we can deny ourselves, we shall humbly submit to God's will. A prudent foresight of possible evils, as future to us, helps us to sustain them. Since man was expelled the terrestrial paradise, and is below the celestial, he is liable to innumerable afflicting accidents. His condition is like an open sea, so inconstant, so violent and furious; sometimes the ships are raised upon the top of the waves, as if they sailed in the air, and sometimes plunged into the waters, ready to be swallowed up. Such frequent changes happen in our passages to eternity, and it is mercifully ordered so by the Divine Wisdom, that we may "so use the world, as not to abuse it" and ourselves, by loving and overvaluing it. Thus we see that often the brightest prosperity is eclipsed, to convince us, by the miserable changes in this world, that the best estate of man is altogether vanity, and that these things are utterly insufficient to make us happy. Now the consideration of the mutable nature of things here below, keeps the heart loose from them—fortifies us with proper thoughts to

bear evils that happen, and prevents disappointments, that aggravate our troubles, and increase the vexation of the mind. There is indeed a foresight of evils that may befall us, that has torment, that anticipates and exasperates misery. Fear, that gives the signal of approaching evils, often brings more terror than caution ; and, like a cowardly sentinel, by a false alarm astonishes rather than prepares the mind to encounter danger. Our Saviour strictly forbids such perplexing apprehensions of future evils, as most unbecoming christians, who are under the perpetual providence of their heavenly Father : "Take no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself," Matt. vi. 34. But, on the contrary, to be secure in our prosperity, as if we should always enjoy a favorable course of things—as if our most flourishing comforts did not spring from an earthly original, and might be suddenly blasted, or easily cut down, is to lay ourselves open to surprising disorders and perplexities, when evils befall us. Serious and mournful reflection on our guilt, and what we deserve from Divine justice, is both a motive and a means to suppress impatience and murmuring, and to allay inordinate grief in our sufferings. We are directed by the wise preacher, "In the day of adversity consider :"—it is a proper season to review conscience, "to search and try our ways,"—to take a sad and serious examination of our lives. If God should exact the rigid score of our debts, and make us as miserable as we are sinful, yet is there the greatest reason to justify him, and accuse ourselves; much more when our punishment is far below our deserts. Humility is the parent of meekness, they are both graces of the same complexion and features. Our Saviour, in the order of the beatitudes, first declared, "Blessed are the poor in spirit,"

that have a low opinion of themselves, as nothing in spirituals, and worse than nothing in sin ; as empty of all that is holy and good, and compounded of all evil ; and “blessed are they that mourn,” in a sense of their sins ; and then, “Blessed are the meek,” and these are joined, because meekness is a disposition inseparable from the other : he that duly considers that he is a miserable sinner, a worthless rebel, and is humbly and sorrowfully affected for his unworthiness, his passions will be subdued ; and, as melted metal receives any form, so he patiently suffers what God inflicts. A “broken heart” is an “acceptable sacrifice” to God, Psalm li, and implies a tender sense of sin, as an offence to the holy and gracious God ; and it may be extended to signify a heart that is submissive to God’s will, in allusion to a horse that is broken, and easily managed by the reins of the rider. Contrition for sin is always joined with resignation to the chastening providence of God. Besides, godly sorrow will lessen natural sorrow. Sin first deserves our grief, and the sharpest accents of our grief should be placed upon it ; and the more sensible we are of it, the lighter will affliction be to us : the turning the stream of sorrow from affliction to sin, is a powerful means to abate it ; there is health in the bitterness of medicine, and ease in the depth of this sadness. Besides, repentance inclines the heart of God, and opens his tender compassions to the afflicted. When the repentant sinner is covered with tears, the great Comforter descends, and brings healing to the troubled waters ; this advice is more necessary for the afflicted, because, usually, the strokes of Providence are properly a reproof and correction for sin : the application of a corrosive, implies that some corrupt matter is to be discharged. God is provoked by his children’s neglects, and though love

cannot hate, it may be angry ; and without renewing their repentance, and recovering his favor, their afflictions are very bitter. What can be more sad than to feel the sting of a guilty conscience within, and the displeasure of God without ? The burden is heavy and oppressive that is laid upon a galled back. It is therefore, our best wisdom, and duty too, " to search our hearts and try our ways," that we may discover what is the procuring cause of our troubles, " and turn unfeignedly to the Lord." This will endear afflicted souls to God, and incline him to afford gracious supports to them. It is true sometimes our sufferings are designed for trial. Counterfeit coin, though with a fair stamp and inscription, is discovered by the fire ; thus mere professing christians, or specious hypocrites, are made known by trials ; but true gold endures the fire without loss, and the more it is tried, the brighter it is. Thus the true christian, whom neither the gain of the world, nor the loss of life can remove from the stedfast owning of the holy truth, has a clear manifestation of his sincerity. There may be a feast within the house, when a storm of hail rattles upon the tiles. But it is, sometimes, so ordered by Providence, that the evils we suffer are of a mixed nature, partly chastisements, and partly trials. This was the case of the believing Hebrews, to whom the apostle directs his counsel, Heb. xii ; their persecution was from the ungodly heathen, for a cause purely religious ; but it was permitted by the righteous God, as a punishment of their sins. And here the Divine goodness and wisdom is admirable, that the same affliction is instrumental for the purifying his people from sin, and the advancement of his glorious gospel. The first and most immediate effect of His discipline is the humbling and sanctifying them, to prepare them for his

love ; by which they are fortified to bear courageously the worst evils. We should also apply the mind to consider the blessings we receive, as well as the evils we endure. Whilst the intense thoughts are fixed upon the suffering, the soul is racked with inward tortures ; but did we turn our eyes upon our enjoyments, and the comforts that are interwoven with our troubles, it would be a means, not only to compose us to patience, but thankfulness. The apostle directs us, to "trust in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy," 2 Tim. vi. 17. In the poorest and lowest state of life, we have many favors and effects of His rich bounty ; and it is the ignorance of our deservings and of our enjoyments, that causes discontent and murmuring under our troubles. Particularly, this consideration will be effectual to repress the discontent that is apt to kindle in our breasts, upon the sight of the different dispensations of Providence, that some are exempt from the current adversities of the world, and live in ease, whilst we are deprived of many outward comforts. How many are under tormenting pains, or in desperate sadness, their minds bewildered and gone, they have no taste or comfort in their abundance ? How many are fallen into the depths of misery, and that, aggravated by the remembrance of former happiness ? How many are surrounded by their cruel and bitter enemies, and see no refuge, no sanctuary for their escape, but a necessity of perishing ? And can we pretend a better title to the mercies of God, than our fellow-worms ? Our original is from nothing, and our works are sinful ;—that we are not so desolately miserable as others, when equally guilty, is from the rich goodness of God, and should make us thankful. Add further, let the most afflicted of God's people in the world compare his condition with that of the most prosperous wicked per-

sons, and the comparison will be effectual to endear God to him, and quiet his passions under suffering. The good things of this world, in their abundance, variety, and excellence, cannot make him, that is without God, truly happy ; the miseries of this life, in all kinds and degrees, cannot make a child of God utterly miserable ; nay, they are inestimably more happy in their sufferings, than the ungodly in their prosperity. Manna rains down from heaven while they are in the wilderness ;—supports and comforts are from the love of God shed abroad in their hearts ; and their present afflictions are a seed of eternal joy, to meeten and prepare them for the joy of heaven. Our Saviour, from whose judgment we receive the true weights and measures of things, to regulate our esteem and affections, declares to his disciples, when under the sharpest persecutions of the tongues or hands of their enemies—under tortures—calumnies—disgrace and death, even then he declares them “ blessed, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them ;” and heaven is such a transcendent blessedness, that even the lively hope of it should make us blessed under any affliction : by the same rule the most prosperous sinners are miserable here, for the irresistible, irremediable ruin that is ordained and prepared for them in hell, they would deceive themselves with the paintings of happiness, with an airy imaginary happiness ; whilst the senses are filled, the soul is empty ; but they will not long enjoy the ease of their ignorance and security ; the world can do no more to make them happy than if one should compound a draught and give it to the poor and miserable, that induces sleep and pleasant dreams for a few hours, but when they awake, they are still poor and miserable. Our Saviour pronounces a woe to the rich and full, “ to those that laugh now, for they shall weep and mourn.”

Lastly,—frequent and fervent prayer to the “Father of mercies, and God of all consolation,” is a blessed means to support the spirit, and make it humble and obedient to the afflicting providence of God. It is a Divine counsel—“Is any afflicted, let him pray.” It is prayer opens the heart, and carnal grief breathes out—prayer opens heaven, and Divine joy flows into the soul. The King of Glory keeps no state, there is always easy access to His throne, and his ears are always open to his humble suppliants. His most gracious nature inclines Him to sustain us in our dejections. We have a powerful plea from His compassions to encourage our prayers in great troubles. “He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.” The most glorious attribute of the Spirit—“The Comforter,” is most useful and beneficial to afflicted suppliants ; affliction is the season, and prayer the sphere of his activity. That our prayers may prevail, take the following useful rules :—

1. They must be addressed with an humble trust on the mercies of God, that incline him to relieve and sustain the afflicted. Thus St. James directs the afflicted, to “ask in faith, nothing wavering,” chap. i. 6. We read in scripture of the light of God’s countenance—his melting eye—the compassionate expressions of his most gracious nature towards his suffering people. He doth not esteem himself more highly honored with the glorious titles of Creator and King, than with the endearing name of our Father ; and with a confidence becoming that relation, we are directed by his Divine Son to make our requests to Him. Indeed, if the promises of God did not encourage our hopes, we should not presume so much upon his affection, as to lay the burden of our cares and sorrows on his arms ; but heaven is not fuller of stars, to

enlighten the darkness of the night, than the scripture is of precious promises, for refreshing the disconsolate. "Behold I have graven thee on the palms of my hands." It is His dear title, "God that comforteth those that are cast down," 2 Cor. vii. 6. Add to this, the interest of his people in Jesus Christ, who ever lives to make intercession for them. None is more tenderly inclined to mercy, than he that has suffered misery; and Christ felt our sorrows, that he might afford relief to us. Whilst He was upon earth, and was followed by a multitude of diseased, miserable persons, virtue went out of him, and healed them all: and, since his ascent to heaven, has he withdrawn that universal, healing virtue, and left us under irremediable and unmitigable sorrows? Did His compassionate eye regard all that were afflicted, and are we now out of his sight? Then such was his indulgent humanity, that, although he could have performed the cure by a word, yet he readily offered to attend a sick servant: "I will come and heal him." And now he is raised from his humble state on earth, to his throne in heaven, does he disdain to extend his merciful hand for our relief? No, His heart and love are the same in heaven as upon earth. It is true He is exempted from all passionate frailties that are inconsistent with his felicity, and the glory of his kingdom; but he still retains the same solid love—the same God-like compassion—the same ready will to support and deliver his people in misery. He, in his exaltation at the right hand of God, has all power equal to his infinite love, that is suitable to the permanent relation between Him and his people. And such is the spiritual union between the Divine Head and his members, that from heaven he rebuked the cruel persecutor of his saints, in language expressing the union between Himself and

them: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" He does not say, why persecutest thou my saints—why my servants, but, "why me?" Though He is not capable of any sorrowful sense, yet his affections are quick and vigorous to his people. If it were possible that his joy, wherewith he is infinitely blessed, could be increased, it would be in the effusions of his goodness to afflicted christians. "Let us therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." How heavy soever our calamities are, let them not sink our spirits into despair, but raise them to nearer approaches to the God of consolation.

God teaches us to profit by our afflictions, and this should afford matter of joy and thanksgiving. The Psalmist declares, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and instructest out of thy law." The Divine Teacher gives a right understanding of sufferings, for what end they are sent, and teacheth by the voice of the rod to obey his word. He instructs us in our duty by the clearest convictions, and infuses gracious dispositions suitable to his doctrine.—He gives directing light, and a seeing eye to perceive it.—He presents heavenly consolations, and prepares the heart to receive them. Now what St. Paul speaks of the cross of Christ, is applicable to the cross of saints: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified to me, and I to the world." And if the cross of a christian be the means of internal mortification,—if thereby this vain, deceiving world be rendered contemptible to him, and his affections are raised to things above, he will find cause to glory in tribulation.

To conclude,—there is no affliction, how great soever,

though, with respect to natural means, unremovable and unmitigable, yet if it be sanctified by Divine grace, a christian, while he is so afflicted, has more cause of joy than grief—more reason to bless God for it, than to murmur and complain. “In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you,” 1 Thess. v. 18. He turns afflictions into benefits, and our affectionate praises are due to Him on that account.

CV. O Zion ! afflicted with wave upon wave,
Whom no man can comfort, whom no man can save :
With darkness surrounded, by terrors dismay'd,
In toiling and rowing thy strength is decay'd.

Loud roaring, the billows would thee overwhelm,
But skilful's the Pilot, that sits at the helm ;
His wisdom, his pow'r, his faithfulness stand,
Engag'd to conduct thee in safety, to land.

“ O fearful, O faithless,” in mercy He cries,
“ My promise, my truth, are they light in thine eyes ?
Still, still, I am with thee, and faithful to keep,
Tho' seeming, amid the rough tempest, to sleep.

Forget thee, I will not, I cannot forget
What Calvary witness'd to cancel thy debt,
On the palms of my hands, while looking, I see
The wounds I receiv'd, in suff'ring for thee.

I feel at my heart all thy sighs and thy groans,
For thou art most near me, my flesh and my bones ;
In all thy distresses, thy head feels the pain,
Yet all are now needful, not one is in vain.”

O Saviour, we trust thee, our life is secure,
Thy wisdom is perfect, supreme is thy pow'r :
In love thou correctest, our souls to refine,
To make us at length in thy likeness to shine.

The foolish, the fearful, the weak are thy care ;
The helpless, the hopeless, thou hearest their pray'r ;
From all our afflictions thy glory shall spring,
The deeper our sorrows, the louder we'll sing.

CVI. Our way, in this world, is like a walk under a row of trees, checkered with light and shade ; and, because we cannot all along walk in sunshine, we therefore perversely fix only on the darker passages, and so lose all the comfort of our comforts. Now, O christian, recollect thyself: consider how many mercies thou enjoyest with thy afflictions, in that they are not so extreme as thy sins deserved; they are such as might easily be borne, didst thou not thyself magnify and aggravate them by thy impatience. The truth is, men dress up their afflictions in a black, hideous shape, and then are frightened at what they have made so formidable. For shame then, never repine or complain at God's dealings with thee; lest God, to punish thee for thy impatience and murmuring, under more gentle and easy afflictions, prepare such for thee, whose little finger shall be heavier than their loins, 1 Kings xii. 10; and whereas, before, he chastised thee with rods, henceforth he may chastise thee with scorpions. Consider, how many thousands in the world are in a far worse condition than yourselves; and would account themselves happy were they in your circumstances. How unreasonable is it then, to complain of God's dispensations ! Do we think that God is more indebted to us, than he is to them ? Or, that he wrongs us, if he doth not bestow more upon us, than upon all the world beside ? Thou art, possibly, impatient at the loss of a child, or of some near and dear relation; but, how many are there in the world, to whom these are given, as the greatest crosses and

burdens of their lives ! Thou art, perhaps, under racking pains, or languishest under lingering and consuming diseases, and frettest thyself with impatience ! though, possibly, thou mayest have all accommodations of means and attendance to ease and comfort thee ; but, canst thou find none that suffer the same pains, the same diseases, and it may be, in a far more sharp and severe measure, and yet are destitute of all the other comforts thou enjoyest, and have nowhere to breathe out their sighs and their sorrows but in the open air, or at the threshold of thy door ? Certainly, were all the evils and miseries that mankind endure, amassed together, and brought into one common stock, and then distributed by equal shares among all men, thy lot and thy portion of them would, perhaps, be much greater than now it is ; and therefore, it is very unjust, as well as unreasonable for thee to complain, since God hath been more kind and more favorable to thee, than to thousands of others. But, the misery is, that pride and self-love make us always take our measures from those that are above us ; and, if we see any more prosperous than ourselves, we presently murmur and quarrel at God's proceedings ; we are apt to think that He deals rigidly with us, because He deals more favorable with some ; whereas, were we humble enough to look below ourselves, we should, everywhere, find miserable objects ; and see abundant cause to bless and praise God, that it is not with us as with them. As another motive to patience, consider of how short duration all the troubles and afflictions of this life are. Though your way be thorny and miry, yet it is but short. A few sighs more may bring you to heaven, where all sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and everlasting joy succeed these temporary miseries. And what ! cannot thy patience stand

out one hard brunt ; and endure a short shock, though it be fierce and violent ? It is but a storm, that will quickly blow over ; and thou mayest live to see serene and bright days again, even in this world ; and if not in this world, yet then, when thou shalt be got above these clouds, and this region of tempests, into that mansion of peace and joy, where never sorrows nor sufferings can enter. Indeed, impatience is a great prolonger of torment ; it is not our pain, but our impatience, that makes the time seem so long and tedious to us : both sense and reason tell us that the sun riseth over a sick man's bed as over the healthy and vigorous ; and that the hours roll away as fast over the miserable as the prosperous ; yet, how swift are our days spent in ease and pleasure ! the hours seem to overtake and crowd into one another. And yet, certainly, thy sad and thy cheerful days have both one and the same measure : the shadow creeps as fast about the dial of a miserable man, as of the happy. The difference lies only within thyself. Impatience, fretfulness, repining, an uncontrolled and eager spirit, vain hopes and impotent desires, make short afflictions seem long, and long ones endless. But, were these cured, thou wouldest find it altogether unreasonable to complain of the length of thy afflictions, when yet they are whirled away, and pass with the same fleetness, which makes others complain that their pleasures and their lives are too short.

However, here consider :—

1. Let thy afflictions be as grievous as thy passion can describe them, yet, doth God afford thee no lucid intervals ? Hast thou no intermission from thy sorrows ?—no breathing-time afforded thee ? Surely this is mercy ; and this time of thy ease ought not to be reckoned into suffering, as commonly it is. Indeed,

men have an art of making their sorrows longer than they really are. Certainly, the affliction can be no longer than it lies upon thee ; and that, usually, is but a very inconsiderable time, compared to that wherein God relieves and comforts thee. Job complains that God brought his sorrows so thick and fast upon him, that he would not suffer him to take his breath, Job ix. 18. He was like a man shipwrecked in a tempest, where the surges and billows broke so fast upon him, that he had not time so much as to lift up his head above the water to take breath. But hath God dealt so with thee ?—Hast thou not had a morning as well as an evening to make up thy day ? Though the clouds return again after the rain, and whatsoever affliction it be recurs, yet, it is mercy that God hath interrupted the course of it—that God hath given thee an interval of ease ; and, then, thou canst no more, with truth, say, that thou hast had uninterrupted misery.

2. If thou be not relieved sooner, yet it cannot be long ere death will put an end to thy temporal sufferings. And therefore, though the days of thy pilgrimage be evil, yet since they are but few, this may recompense for the other, and persuade thee to bear patiently, what thou art not to bear long. Think with thyself, “ It is but a few days, or a few years more, that I shall be in a suffering, in an afflicted condition. I am travelling through a vale of misery, but my grave is in view : there I shall throw down all this load of care and trouble—where none of the vexations of this life shall disturb me,—“ There the weary be at rest : ” and what ! shall I faint under my burdens, when I am to bear them but so short a time ? Take courage, O soul, that happy hour is hastening on, as fast as the wings of time can speed it, which shall give ease to thy pain, and rest

to thy weariness. Death will shortly come in to thy relief, take off thy load, and lay thee to sleep in thy grave.

3. All our troubles and afflictions are infinitely short, and as nothing, in comparison with eternity. If, at any time, the greatness, and soreness, and long continuance of them tempt thee to impatience, cast but thine eyes upon eternity, and they will all so shrink and vanish under that comparison, that they will scarce deserve the name of afflictions. Take all the flux of time, from the creation of the world to this present moment, and we reckon it by hundreds and thousands of years ; it seems to us a mighty time, but compare it to eternity, and it presently shrinks up to nothing ; it is lost and swallowed up in that bottomless gulph. Yea, the smallest drop of water is infinitely more considerable to the great ocean, than thousand thousands of years are to an eternal duration. And art thou not ashamed, then, to complain of the length and continuance of thy afflictions, since they are as nothing in comparison with the rest of thy life ; and thy life itself nothing in comparison with eternity ? And, certainly, could our thoughts dwell more upon that eternal state that awaits us, the consideration of this would enable us to bear our present short afflictions with patience ; and we should not think them long or intolerable. The happiness of heaven may well comfort us, in respect of our miseries on earth. Christians, think but seriously with yourselves, that, though your way be rugged and tiresome, yet it is the way that leads to your Father's house ; and, though you come there wet with your tears, and wearied with your burdens, yet there you shall be surely welcome, and enjoy an eternity of rest ; there, you shall sit down, and, with everlasting joy, recount to your brethren, a whole ring of surrounding

saints, all the wonderful methods of Divine providence, which brought you thither ; and with infinite satisfaction see the necessity and mercy of those afflictions, which you have here endured : there, your garments of heaviness, shall be changed into garments of praise—there, you shall ever rest your tired souls in the bosom of Jesus Christ, and for ever enjoy so great an happiness, that it were infinitely worth suffering all the miseries and afflictions of this life, to have but one momentary taste of it. Didst thou know what the glory of heaven is, thou wouldest be content to lie upon the rack—to endure the sharpest paroxysms of the most torturing and cruel pains all thy life long ; and account them easy and short, if these could purchase for thee one hour's enjoyment of the unspeakable glory and happiness of heaven. And wilt thou then be fretful and impatient under thy present sufferings, when these are prepared to be the inlet to such enjoyment ?—where thou shalt be for ever confirmed in the possession of all good—where thou shalt never more be in a possibility of suffering ; nor know what a sad thought or a sad moment means. Certainly did we dwell more upon the thoughts of eternity, we should not be so irrational, as to judge that long, which takes up but a very little part of that time, which, of itself, is nothing, compared to an eternal duration.

And thus we see by how many motives patience under suffering is pressed upon us ; which, if we would bring under the view of our serious consideration, we shall find enough in them, to incline the most fretful and peevish nature, to a quiet and meek submission to the hand and will of God. For, it is a most necessary grace for a christian, in the whole conduct of his life, which is full of troubles and afflictions ; and nothing can so alleviate them as patience. The author and inflicter of all thy

sufferings is God, who is absolute in his sovereignty : our proprietor, as our Lord ; infinitely gracious and merciful, as our Father—infinitely faithful to his word, whereby he hath promised,—and infinitely wise and skilful, whereby he is able to work all things for our good and benefit ; and consider the great benefits and advantages that accrue to us by afflictions, as they are exercise to our graces—physic to our souls—evidences of our adoption. Consider, again, the patient bearing of afflictions is a very great honor both to ourselves and to God : it is, likewise, the best and readiest way to be freed from afflictions ; no affliction befalls us, but what is tolerable, and common to men ; how many in the world are in a far worse condition than ourselves ; and all our afflictions are but short and momentary in comparison of eternity, and these will powerfully sway us to patience under those sorrows we suffer. Let us too, consider, and bear in mind, that admirable exhortation of the wise man, Prov. iii. 11, and urged by the apostle, Heb. xii 5, “ My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.” Here we have a most excellent temper set forth to us, as a mean, between stupidity and desponding impatience. We ought to be affected with the hand of God ; and not to demean ourselves under afflictions, as though we felt no smart, neither cared what God did against us, but rather defied him to do his worst. It is a sign of desperate incorrigibleness and deadness, when we are so past feeling, as to despise the correction of the rod. Moderate passions are allowed us ; and God, when he afflicts us, would have us to show ourselves to be men, but not to be hardened so as not to feel his strokes. But then again, on the other hand, beware, that as thou dost not despise, so thou dost not despond under the corrections of thy

heavenly Father. Fortify thy spirit ; arm it with all the arguments that are proper to encourage thee in a suffering condition, do not permit it to grow too tender ; and, instead of being sensible, to be sore and fretful. Impatience sits ill upon a christian, and renders him contemptible. We do never so unman ourselves, as by peevishness and fretful humours. Impatience always proceeds from weakness ; and while we toss, and tumultuate, and express the eagerness of an ulcerated mind, in all the intemperate language and actions that passion suggests, we are but a grief to some, a sport to others, and fall under the scorn and contempt of all. Let us think with ourselves, how unseemly is the wild and extravagant fury of a distracted person ! Consider too, the folly of impatience. To what purpose is it, that thou vexest and torturtest thyself ? Couldest thou ease or relieve thyself by it, this might be some plea, and reasonable pretence. But was it ever heard, that the disordering the mind composed a man's estate ? or that raising a tempest within, should lay a tempest without ? Nay, rather impatience adds a mighty weight to our burdens, whilst we must bear both them and it too. And, therefore, confirm and strengthen your minds against all adversities that may befall you : fix your resolutions, that thus it ought to be, and that thus it is best for you : and whatsoever portion God carves out for you, receive it with thankfulness : if it be prosperous, as your food—if adverse, as your medicine.

Another way to cure and remove this cause of impatience is to sit loose to the things of this world. Let them not occupy your hearts. For, be assured, if once the soul and affections be riveted to these earthly concernments, whenever God shall take them from you, it

will be a violent tearing and rending of your very hearts to part with them : strive to bring yourselves into a holy indifference of all things here below ; and then, whatever happens, nothing can fall out much amiss. If you have no extravagant affection for the enjoyment of these things, you will have no violent passions stirring in you for their loss. If thou didst truly estimate what this world is, how vain, how false, how empty, and insignificant, how vexatious and cumbersome, thou wouldest find abundant reason to conclude, that it is not very material, whether thou be high or low, rich or poor, persecuted or favored, despised or honored ; for, all these things are but dreams ; and, as dreams, they vanish and pass away. Let us take the apostle's direction, 1 Cor. vii. 29—31 : "The time is short : it remaineth, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not abusing it : for the fashion of this world passeth away." And certainly, could we but bring ourselves to this excellent indifference, we should not be much molested, nor grow fretful and impatient, for any losses or disappointments in things we look upon as of no great concernment. Self-denial and humility would greatly assist us in this endeavour. That man is most secure from impatience who entertains but mean thoughts of himself ; for, what strong temptation can there be to any great excess of impatience, so long as we only suffer in that which we do not highly value ? Why should I vex or fret myself, that such a man speaks ill of me ? Alas ! he speaks not worse of me, than I speak and think of myself. Shall I be discomposed, because he hath

done me such an injury? Why, I shall but gratify him by that means; and, perhaps, he did it with that very design; and besides, he hath far more injured himself than me, so long as I can keep my patience entire. Or, shall I murmur and repine, because God hath brought upon me such a calamity? Alas! this is a favor and mercy, in comparison of what I have deserved at His hands; when I consider what I have done against him, all that He hath done against me is nothing; my sins deserve no less than eternal death, and eternal damnation; and certainly, I have no reason to complain, so long as I am out of hell: God were infinitely gracious and merciful to me, though he should redouble his strokes—multiply my sorrows—and increase my sufferings: and I were the most ungrateful wretch alive, if I should repine at bearing so little, when I have deserved so much. Thus, I say, humility, a contrite and broken frame of spirit, will preserve us from being fretful and impatient, whether we lie under injuries from men, or afflictions from God.

It may sometimes heighten impatience, to reflect upon the base ingratitude and foul disingenuity of those, from whom we suffer. Persons, perhaps, whom we have obliged by the greatest obligations imaginable. Such, who we thought, had as much reason to love us as themselves; and would have been as far from doing us an injury, as their own natures. Yet, for such as these to violate all bonds of friendship, and all laws of gratitude: for such frozen snakes to fly at us, and sting us, whom we have warmed and cherished in our own bosoms, and who, without our support, could not have had the power to injure us; this, saith impatience, makes the injury altogether insufferable! But to cure this sad and fretful distemper of thy spirit, be sure that

thou look off from the instruments of thy sufferings, unto God, who is the principal inflicter of them ; and then, if thou wilt calmly reflect, those, which were provocations to impatience, when thou lookest to men, will prove strong and forcible arguments for patience, if thou lookest to God.

Consider, who, or what art thou, but breathing dust, the very sediment and dregs of nature ? and, yet, how often hast thou daringly provoked and affronted the great and glorious God of heaven and earth ! Every the least sin thou hast committed—the least vain and unworthy thought—the least idle, and impertinent word—is a far greater injury done to God, than the most unjust and ungrateful outrage from thy fellow-creature can be against thee. It is thy fellow-creature, that wrongs thee ; one, whose being and nature is altogether as considerable as thine own ; but thou sinnest against the infinite majesty of Jehovah, thy almighty Creator ; in comparison with whom, thou, and all the nations of the earth, are less than nothing and vanity ; more nothing, than nothing itself is. And wilt thou not be patient under the affronts of thy fellow-creatures, when thou, who art infinitely inferior unto God, yet livest, and art yet out of hell, only through his patience unto thee ?

Is not thy whole dependance upon Him ? Doth He not maintain thee ? Hath He not educated, and brought thee up—called—chosen—redeemed, and sanctified thee ? Doth He not daily provide for thee ? Doth He not heap his blessings upon thee, and load thee every day with benefits ? And yet, O ungrateful man ! thou art daily wronging and provoking Him ! And therefore, if He doth at last chastise and afflict thee, thou surely hast no reason to murmur and complain ; for it seems, it is but

thine own law : it is no otherwise than thou wouldest thyself deal with thy fellow-creature, over whom thou hast no such right, and from whom thou hast not suffered, by infinite proportions, so much as thy God hath done from thee. Nothing aggravates our sufferings, or puts a sharper edge upon afflictions, than to compare present miseries with past happiness. But in this we may see very much of the perverseness of our nature, in turning that, which ought to be an engagement to our thankfulness, into an occasion of murmuring. For, either thy former prosperity was a mercy or not ; if not, thou hast no cause to complain of the change : if it were, certainly, thou hast a reason rather to bless God, than to repine that he hath blessed thee.

Finally,—this should be for our encouragement, that this hard and difficult duty will be but for a little while incumbent upon us. Whatsoever is irksome, will be shortly over ; and, when we are passed through this vale of tears and misery, as our faith shall be turned into vision—our hope into fruition, so our patience shall be turned into joy, and triumph.

CVII. Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow thee ;
Naked, poor, despis'd, forsaken,
Thou, from hence, my all shalt be :
Perish ev'ry fond ambition,
All I've sought, or hop'd, or known,
Yet how rich is my condition,
God and heav'n are still my own.

Let the world despise and leave me,
They have left my Saviour too ;
Human hearts and looks deceive me,
Thou art not, like them, untrue :

And whilst thou shalt smile upon me
God of wisdom, love and might,
Foes may hate, and friends may scorn me,
Show thy face, and all is bright.

Go, then, earthly fame and treasure,
Come disaster, scorn, and pain,
In thy service pain is pleasure,
With thy favor loss is gain :
I have called thee, Abba, Father,
I have set my heart on thee,
Storms may howl, and clouds may gather,
All must work for good to me.

Man may trouble and distress me,
Twill but drive me to thy breast,
Life with trials hard may press me,
Heav'n will bring me sweeter rest :
Oh ! 'tis not in grief to harm me,
While thy love is left to me,
Oh ! 'twere not in joy to charm me,
Were that joy unmix'd with thee.

Soul, then know thy full salvation,
Rise o'er sin, and fear, and care,
Joy to find in ev'ry station,
Something still to do and bear :
Think what spirit dwells within thee ;
Think what Father's smiles are thine,
Think that Jesus died to save thee :
Child of Heav'n, canst thou repine.

Haste thee on from grace to glory,
Arm'd by faith, and wing'd by pray'r,
Heav'n's eternal days before thee,
God's own hand shall guide thee there :

Soon shall close thy earthly mission,
Soon shall pass thy pilgrim days,
Hope shall change to glad fruition,
Faith to sight, and pray'r to praise.

FINIS.



